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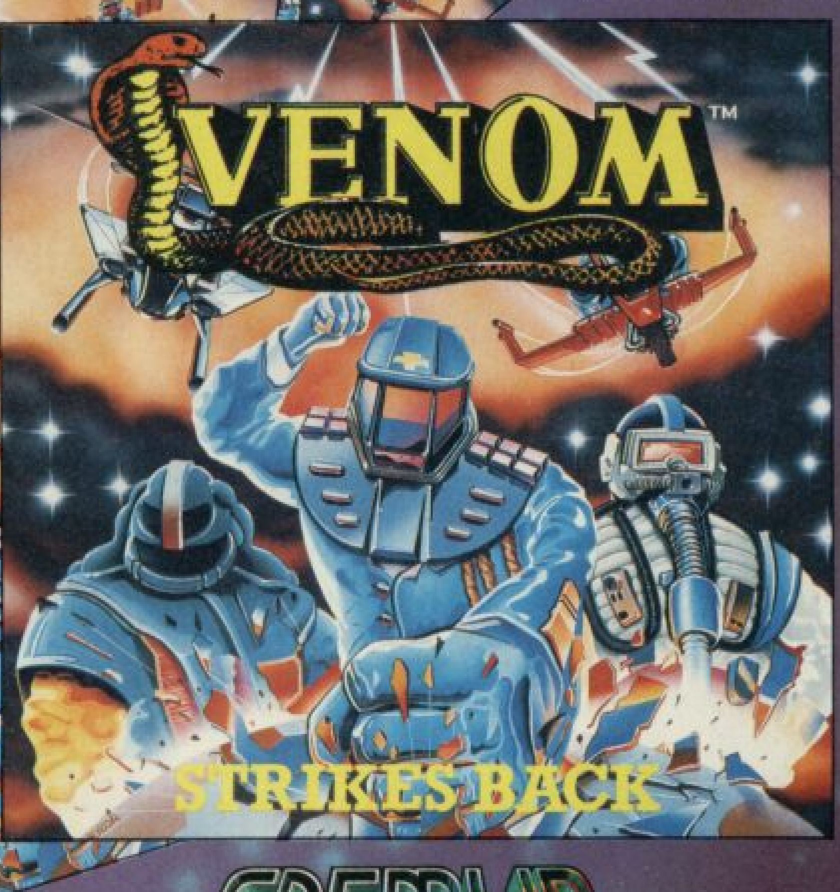
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MARCH 1988

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COMPETITION RULES
The Editor's decision is final in all matters relating to adjudication and while we offer prizes in good faith, believing them to be available, if something untoward happens (like a game that has been offered as a prize being scrapped) we reserve the right to substitute prizes of comparable value. We'll do our very best to despatch prizes as soon as possible after the published closing date. Winners names will appear in a later issue of THE GAMES MACHINE. No correspondence can be entered into regarding the competitions (unless we've written to you stating that you have won a prize and it doesn't turn up, in which case drop Frances Mable a line at the PO Box 10 address). No person who has any relationship, no matter how remote, to anyone who works for either Newsfield or any of the companies offering prizes, may enter one of our competitions.

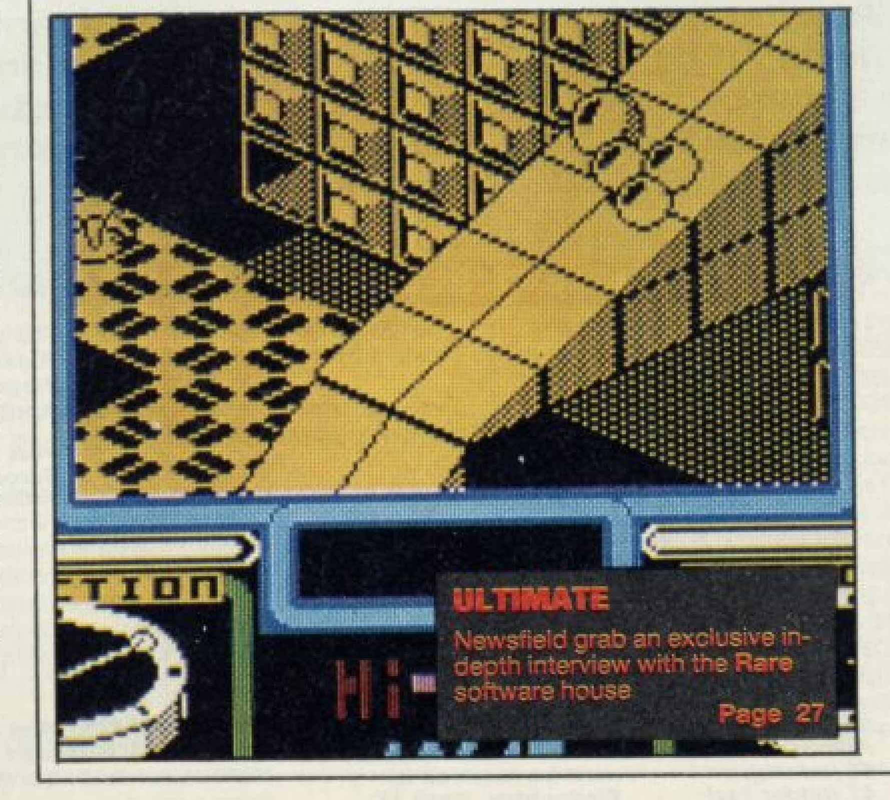
COVER ILLUSTRATION BY OLIVER FREY

THIS ISSUE . . .

FEATURES

REGULARS

WIN!



ULTIMATE
Newsfield grab an exclusive in-depth interview with the Rare software house
Page 27

Issue Five of THE GAMES MACHINE is on sale everywhere from March 17. Don't miss it! If you would like to subscribe, check out Page 82.

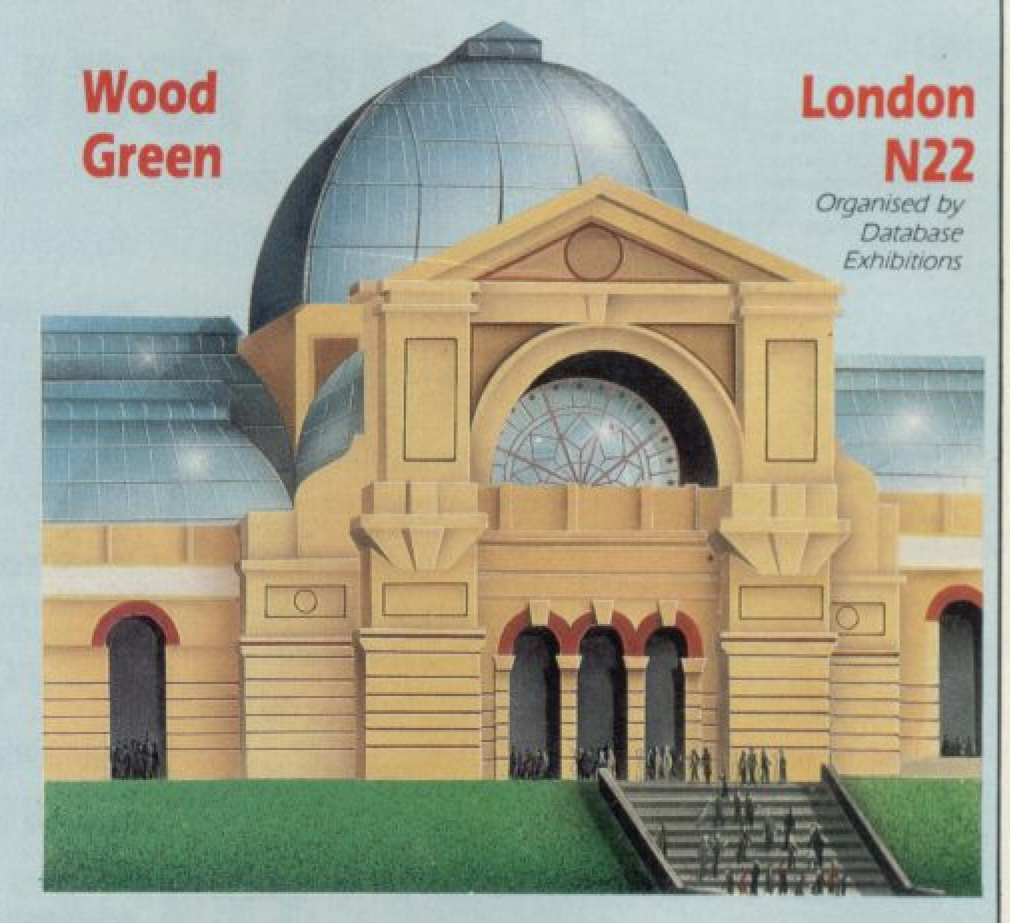
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READERPAGE

As usual, space is the big problem with the READERPAGE. We'd dearly love to include all the letters we receive, but there'd be no room for anything else – and that just wouldn't do would it? If you wish to air your views, send your letter to . . .

READERPAGE, THE GAMES MACHINE, *PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1DB*

THE RETURN OF THE MSX

Dear GAMES MACHINE
I was sorry to read that your only MSX computer was stolen, as I hoped to see some reviews of the latest Konami games. At least it shows what good taste in computers your thief has. It was also good to read Craig Bell's letter in your last mag, he runs the Scottish branch of MSX LINK, and I help run the English section. Our fees are the same, and if anyone would like a sample our mag, they should send a cheque or p/o for £1 to David Webb, 11 Ayscough Avenue, Spalding, Lincs.

Thanks for a great magazine, and here's hoping you obtain an MSX machine as soon as possible. Keep up the good work.

Mr K A Neal, Bourne, Lincs

The TGM team can hardly contain itself, Mr Neal. We have just discovered the whereabouts of a brand new MSX machine which, hopefully, as you read this, will be sitting proudly between our Amiga and Atari ST, just waiting to be loaded with stunning software for the lads to review.

GETTING YOUR BACKUP

Dear GAMES MACHINE
I am very pleased with the format of the new magazine, it's ideal, just what the industry needs. While I found CRASH an excellent magazine for the humble Spectrum, this new format of magazine is perfect for I am very interested in purchasing an Atari ST in the near future, which brings me to the main point of my letter.

Are there (or will there be) any hardware or software back-up systems for the ST? Judging by the price of the software at the moment it would be a great tragedy to accidentally lose or format the bought disk, and then realise you have no back-up copy.

Another thing, will *Zarch* be converted to the ST? Two points: Let's have some machine code listings please, and more features on graphics and music. Apart form this, the magazine is excellent.

Gareth Buge, Kirkintillock, Glasgow G66 3JG

Yes, there are software back-up systems available for the Atari ST.

THEREBY HANGS ANOTHER . . .

Dear GAMES MACHINE
Congratulations on the success of THE GAMES MACHINE. Evidently many other readers share my pleasure in the mix of features and reviews that is just about right. Nice to look forward to it every month now!

The only black spot for me in the current issue is the review of *Bard's Tale* for the ST tucked away at the bottom of page 36. Why version update when you haven't reviewed it before? Please give it another look and a full review for the ST owners like me who have updated to the ST from earlier Atari 8-bit models and who are not familiar with *Bard's Tale*.

I bought Bard's Tale three months ago after a brief look in my local computer shop. Now over 300 hours of play later I have still not finished the game, but I'm still hooked.

The game is great with superb graphics. The animated pictures of the various characters are true works of art – world's apart from the usual cartoon style pictures – and new ones are introduced frequently as the game proceeds. This is a quality game and it shows in every department.

I have played several hundred computer games in the last eight years and none has given me more lasting pleasure or value for money than this one.

Your reviewers comments were fair but I couldn't believe his rating of 65%. Should it have been 85%?

John Holsgrove, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB10 8HR

Singing; Dear John,
Life goes on, by the time you read this reply the reviewer in question will probably still be here (doesn't quite flow does it). This guy is an experienced adventure/role playing person and as such has many years of Dragon bashing, gem finding and sword wielding under his leather belt. However, when questioned (under threat of having his subscription to Balrogs Monthly suspended) he still wouldn't give an inch. In true reviewer style he stands by his comments and the percentage awarded, he feels that 65% is quite high (and so is he, which is why I'm not going to argue with him!). If you still feel the mark given to Bards Tale is unfair, John, you have my permission to get a thin black pen and change your copy to read 85%.

A SOUP MUG?

Dear GAMES MACHINE
Congrats' for a supe' mag. Having seen an add in a sister mag of yours (ZZAP! 64) I said 'what the heck, I'm a hard working guy so I'll go and spend this £1.25.' I wasn't disappointed when I picked you up. What a good read! and full colour too!!

You have got the right mix of articles and I really like your reviews. But one thing puzzles me, why are your overall % marks slightly higher than in your sister mags CRASH! and ZZAP! 64 – Airborne Ranger 82% but in ZZAP! 64 it got only 73%.

I'm looking at buying either an Amiga or ST. I haven't heard much about the ST's sound, does it have better sound than the C64?

Reading in ZZAP! 64 it said that the Amiga would be ideal for true arcade conversions. I'm looking for really in-depth games, not just your 'gain a high score, pretty graphics' game.

I agree with you not offering any prize for the best letter. More often than not you usually get mindless statements from silly wee boys. Well that's me alienated half your readership. Not like my letter. Wasn't that a truly superb read!? Just joking!!

John Luke, Kilwinning, Ayrshire KA13 6SX

The Atari doesn't really have better sound capabilities than the Commodore 64 – it's the amount of extra memory the ST has which allows it to produce sampled sound, digitised speech and all those other pleasing audio effects.

UNBIASED REVIEWERS

Dear GAMES MACHINE
About a year ago when I got my paper round, I started buying CRASH and Sinclair User. I had had my Spectrum since 1982 and had never had the money to buy any up to date games, I enjoyed Sinclair User, but it was CRASH that really showed me what I had been missing all those years. About a month ago I sold my Spectrum and I am getting an ST. I looked around for an Atari magazine but found that they were really poor quality, and did little or nothing to impress the games player. Fortunately I read in CRASH about THE GAMES MACHINE and eagerly awaited it's arrival. It was all I had expected and more. Full colour reviews with in depth comments by a very unbiased board of reviewers. Superb, I for one will carry on getting THE GAMES MACHINE until such time when Newsfield bring out an Amiga-ST only magazine. I have thought of a few ways to make THE GAMES MACHINE even more popular. For a start, try and be a bit less formal. Also, would it be possible to include a hints, tips and pokes section as many games players are very interested in them. I have also been buying Ace, another multi format magazine, but this lacks the colour and depth that TGM offers. Your previews on *Space Harrier* and *Buggy Boy* for the ST, have really convinced me that the ST is the machine for me. Thank you TGM. Keep up the good work.

Jonathan Holloway, Portsmouth

THE BODY BEAUTIFUL

Dear GAMES MACHINE
Referring to your article on sexism in the software industry, I would like to know why there is such objection to the depiction of the human female body.

A quick glance through the advertisements for software in the same issue produces five pieces of fantasy artwork: *Renegade*, *Rygar*, *Gryzor*, *Trantor* and *Athena*. Admittedly *Renegade* and *Athena* both feature scantily clad women but all of them feature well built, muscle bound men (an Arnold Schwarzenegger lookalike minotaur in *Athena*). Now I, being male, don't object to this stereotype image of the human male, that of a 6ft muscle rippling hero. In fact, most males would envy the build of these portraits, so why should women object to beautiful, physically perfect females in computer software artwork.

I don't want to put across the idea that I would accept naked bodies all over advertisements but there is nothing degrading about a physically perfect human being. We are not born with clothes on the human body, both male and female, is a beautiful and remarkable piece of evolution. (I actually prefer the female body but that's another story). We should not knock ourselves.

Finally anyone still disgusted by the *Barbarian* poster, referring to the delicious Maria Whittaker's lack of clothing should glance at the man. Ah, shock horror, he's



only wearing one piece of clothing (not including boots) and has a bigger chest than Maria (though not as soft).

Andrew K, Pontypridd, Mid Glamorgan

Thank you Andrew for giving us another chance to print some nice pictures.

GRAPHICS OR TEXT

Dear GAMES MACHINE

I've just read Ron Handy's letter in your third issue regarding the 2nd National Computer Adventurers Convention (which was held in Sutton back in November) and his opinions on graphics in adventure games.

The convention was organised between the Sutton Computer club and Clubspot, who (amongst other things) run the adventure helpline section on Micronet. As one of the Micronet adventure helpliners I attended this event and like many of the people I met there, I thoroughly enjoyed myself. I also donated my Atari ST for the day, so that adventurers could have a go on some of the latest adventure related software, including a then pre-release version of Magnetic Scroll's *Jinxter*.

I shall remember the day because I got to meet and chat to Mike Austin (of Level 9), listen to Tim Gilberts opinions on adventure creators (and Fergus McNeill was in the audience), meet those people who I had been chatting to on Micronet over the past year AND got to look at some of the latest adventure software on a range of machines, all donated by enthusiasts for the day. Does that sound like a badly organised event to you?

However, I do agree with Ron Handy's comments on graphics in adventure games. I have been fighting a seemingly one man stand in support of the case for graphics in adventures for quite a while now on Micronet, and on CEEFAX where I write the regular Adventure SOS column. On the whole, Magnetic Scrolls graphics are excellent and I like to see them from an artistic point of view. I don't care if they don't contribute anything to solving a game, if they're good then I'm all for them! People say they waste RAM and that they'd rather play a text only Infocom game Well, Infocom use less than half of the disk space on an ST or Amiga for their text, so the 'wasting RAM' argument doesn't really hold water.

I think that good graphics enhance the atmosphere of an adventure tremendously, which is why I've never really liked the Infocom games. For the money, 16-bit machines deserve much better. Good text is obviously essential, but there can't really be that many die hard text only purists in the world can there?

Richard C Hewison, Luton, Beds LU1 4DJ.

The graphics vs text battle rages on and on it seems. If any one else has strong views on this subject why not drop Rob Steel, our home grown adventurous person, a line. I'm sure he'd love to hear from you.

THAT'S THE SPIRIT

Dear GAMES MACHINE

I'm writing to complain about one of your reviews in your Dec/Jan edition. It was on page 50, and the game in question is *Bubble Ghost*.

In your review you quoted 'The urge to see all 1,000 halls does seem to fade after a while.' As I like a challenge I decided to buy the game.

After an hour of playing; to my anger and disbelief I completed the game. There are only 35 halls.

I am 18, and a student, so I only earn £10 a week. The game cost me £20 – two weeks wages.

Was your reviewer drunk, or was he born stupid.

As I have limited money available, I used your magazine to guide me. I am very disappointed with the outcome, and therefore consider some compensation would be appropriate.

Ashley Dennis, Leicester LE3 6FS

You'll be pleased to read, Ashley, that the reviewer in question has been severely rebuked for his lack of attention to detail, or rather he would have been if we could have found the stupid drunkard. It transpires that there was a communication break down between ourselves and Infogrammes and there is actually a thousand traps to overcome or avoid, and not a thousand halls. Both TGM and Infogrammes apologise for this misinformation. If you still feel strongly about the matter, please drop Infogrammes a line, they are more than willing to offer compensation.

ORGANS IN OUR ORGAN

Dear GAMES MACHINE

On the 8th page of THE GAMES MACHINE October/November issue was a picture of two electric organs. Could you send me an address from where I could order them?

Mr Aki Ketolainen, Kelotie 10, SF-26510 Uotila, Finland

Yes Aki, you could probably order them from your home address! Meanwhile, they are available from most large retail outlets of the John Menzies, WH Smith and Preedys ilk.

MSX MISSES OUT

Dear GAMES MACHINE,

I am writing to enquire whether the Software House 'Ocean' will be programming *Rastan the Warrior King* for the MSX computer.

Tristan Dunn, Combe Martin, Devon.

Sorry Tristan, Ocean have no plans at present to convert Rastan to the MSX computer.

MSX I OR II

Dear GAMES MACHINE,

In your second issue there were many reviews on Spectrum, Amstrad and C64 games, but only two on MSX versions. I am a seventeen year old MSX user myself. I liked the comparison between different versions of a game, but in most cases, MSX versions were left out. Such games as *Freddy Hardest, Jack the Nipper II, Arkanoid* and *Krakout* were reviewed for the other 8-bit computers, but you seem you don't even know that these are also available for MSX. Missing MSX means missing about 200,000 possible readers.

I've liked your reviews of the two Konami MSX games in your magazine – *Vampire Killer* and *Metal Gear*, but please specify if they are available for MSX I or MSX II computers.

Saviour Borg, San Gwann, Malta

The problems we have had with our MSX computer are soon to be resolved. Once our newly purchased MSX II is safely snuggled in among our other computers we will be able to review the conversions as and when we receive them.

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

Dear GAMES MACHINE,

I have for the mean time, swapped from C&VG to THE GAMES MACHINE, but if my complaint is not settled I shall have to revert back to my old ways. What is wrong with MSX? It's colour, sound, price, keyboard and everything else are better than the Spectrum, if not the Commodore 64 and Amstrad as well. So why are you so computer racialist? Why does Mel Croucher keep on picking on MSX and its users in his trivia quiz? Why does it get only as many reviews as the, dare I say it, Archimedes? Why do you have no competitions in which you can win MSX software? In fact, why are your competitions so incredibly hard? Will these and many other questions be answered in the next issue of THE GAMES MACHINE?

Roger Adlard, Herts

***The MSX game reviews will return in Issue Five.
Mel Croucher picks on everything and everyone without prejudice. The MSX does get more reviews than Archimedes . . . just. We didn't realise our competitions were incredibly hard, sorry. Yes, these and many other questions will be answered in the next issue of TGM.***

UNCLE MEL HELPS OUT

Sir,

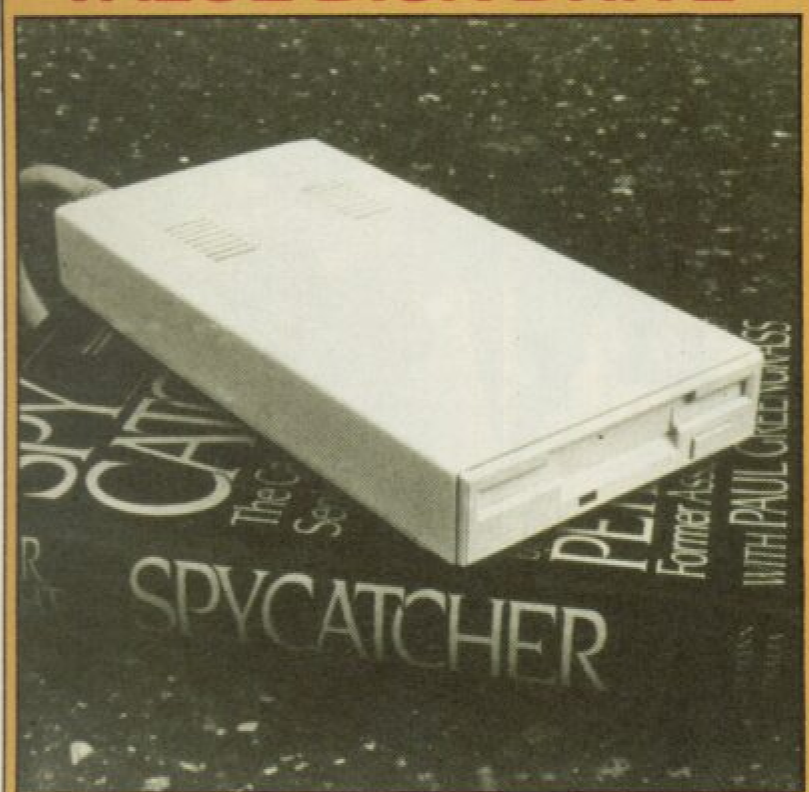
Reference to Dec/Jan issue of THE GAMES MACHINE magazine, the article by Mel Croucher entitled Heaven's Above on page 107, which tells about receiving Satellite TV. After trying several main Post Offices with no success and writing to the TV Licence Office Bristol who have never heard of the form and suggested I write to the DTI London. I seem to have drawn a blank. I wonder if you could be so kind as to let me know where I can obtain the licence in question. Thanking you very much.

Mr B Dean, Marlow, Bucks

UNCLE MEL REPLIES

***My local Head Post Office also denied all knowledge of this Licence Form, but I swear it exists, honest. The problem seems to be that the Licensing Authority has gone and changed itself since my piece went to press, and now comes under the Wireless Telegraphy Act, Radio Communications Division, Department of Trade and Industry, Tel: 01 215 2207. But don't bother to phone them, Mr Dean, I have already sent you a copy of the form in the post 'cos I'm a real nice guy. It's £10.00 for life to receive the wonders of Satellite TV, and it's the bargain of the century. Buy now before the Chancellor wises up!
Mel Croucher***

VALUE DISK DRIVE



EVESHAM MICROS are shortly to be selling a new Amiga compatible disk drive for only £99.95. The drive includes a Citizen drive mechanism and a long cable for convenient positioning. It's design is 'small as well as aesthetically pleasing'.

NINTENDO NUMBER ONE

A chart published by the magazine Toy & Hobby World, declared The Nintendo Entertainment System to be the number one best selling 'toy' (ranked by units sold) for November 1987. Barbie came a close fourth.

THE GIANT AWAKES

EVEN as we go to press with this issue, predictions in our article on Rare Ltd (page 27) about Nintendo moving heavily into Britain soon are beginning to come true.

Mattel UK Ltd has announced that **NESI UK Limited** will be handling the marketing and distribution of the Nintendo Entertainment System in the UK, and NESI is led by the combination of **Ron Judy** and **Bruce Lowry**.

The key name here is that of Ron Judy, because he goes back a long way. He started out in partnership with Alan Stone in 1978 in Seattle as Far East Video, the company that in 1980 was taken over to become Nintendo Of America. Alan Stone is now Vice-President International-Commercial Products Division at Nintendo Of America (a title needing a wide car for the parking space), while Judy was Vice-President of Marketing (smaller car, but more powerful perhaps?) until his recent new appointment to Britain.

The move heralds a powerful push to repeat in Britain what Nintendo has achieved in the past three years in the States. NESI is already establishing a UK base, and we can expect to see a large TV advertising campaign before much longer, backed up by point-of-sale displays in major stores.

WHOOPS APOLOGIES

TGM stated in the last issue that the Ninth Amstrad Show (organised by Database Exhibitions) was to take place on the 19th of February, when in fact the doors opened on the second of that month. We would like to apologise for any confusion we may have caused and place the blame firmly on the shoulders of a typing error.

ATARI SHOW

DATABASE Exhibitions are holding the Atari show in the West Hall of Alexandra Palace between the 22nd and 24th of April (honest!). Tickets on the door are £3.00 for Adults and £2.00 for non adults, £1.00 less if paid for in advance.

MARS COPS MISS THEIR LAUNCH WINDOW

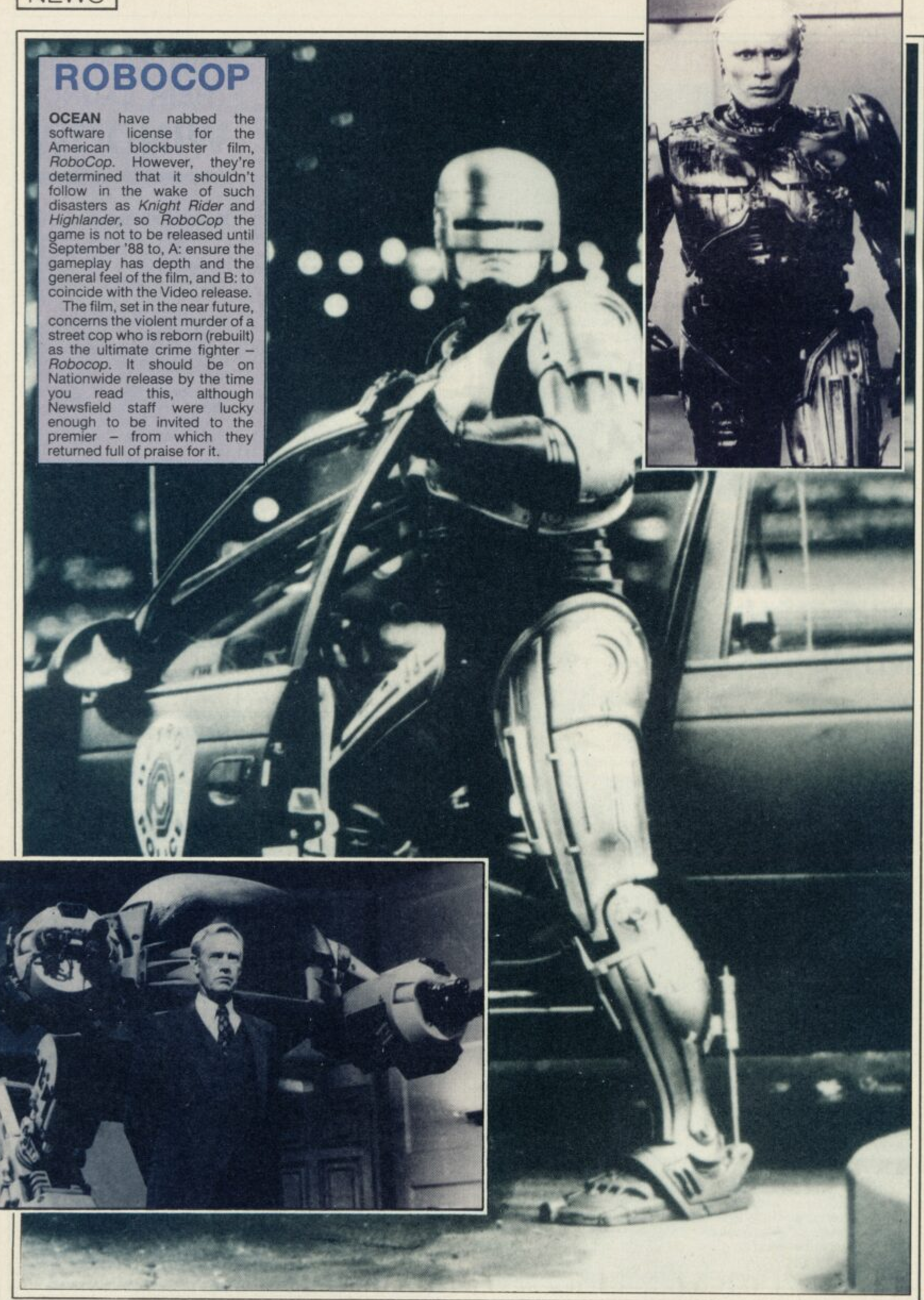
MARS COPS, the space pursuit game from Arcana originally due late last year has hit a few implementation problems and is not likely to appear now until May.

The game has proved to be more ambitious than even Arcana first thought and the Atari ST and Amiga are being pushed hard by the author. With *Mars Cops* being delayed, Arcana's major drive into the 16-bit market will now be piloted by *Powerplay*, the game of the Gods.

A SUCCESSFUL MOVE

KONIX the Welsh based company formed two years ago by **Wyn Holloway** and his wife **Sandra**, have recently moved to a new larger factory. The move follows the enormous success of the last twelve months in which the company more than doubled it's turnover to over half a million pounds a month.

The opening ceremony was performed on the 15th January by the **Rt. Hon Peter Walker**, secretary of state for Wales. Also in attendance was the MP for Blaenau Gwent, the **Rt Hon Michael Foot**. One of the most immediate effects of the move will be extra space and the opportunity for Konix to double their workforce.



ROBOCOP

OCEAN have nabbed the software license for the American blockbuster film, *RoboCop*. However, they're determined that it shouldn't follow in the wake of such disasters as *Knight Rider* and *Highlander*, so *RoboCop* the game is not to be released until September '88 to, A: ensure the gameplay has depth and the general feel of the film, and B: to coincide with the Video release.

The film, set in the near future, concerns the violent murder of a street cop who is reborn (rebuilt) as the ultimate crime fighter – *Robocop*. It should be on Nationwide release by the time you read this, although Newsfield staff were lucky enough to be invited to the premier – from which they returned full of praise for it.

SPECTRUM

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COMMODORE

CASSETTE £8.95 | DISK £12.95

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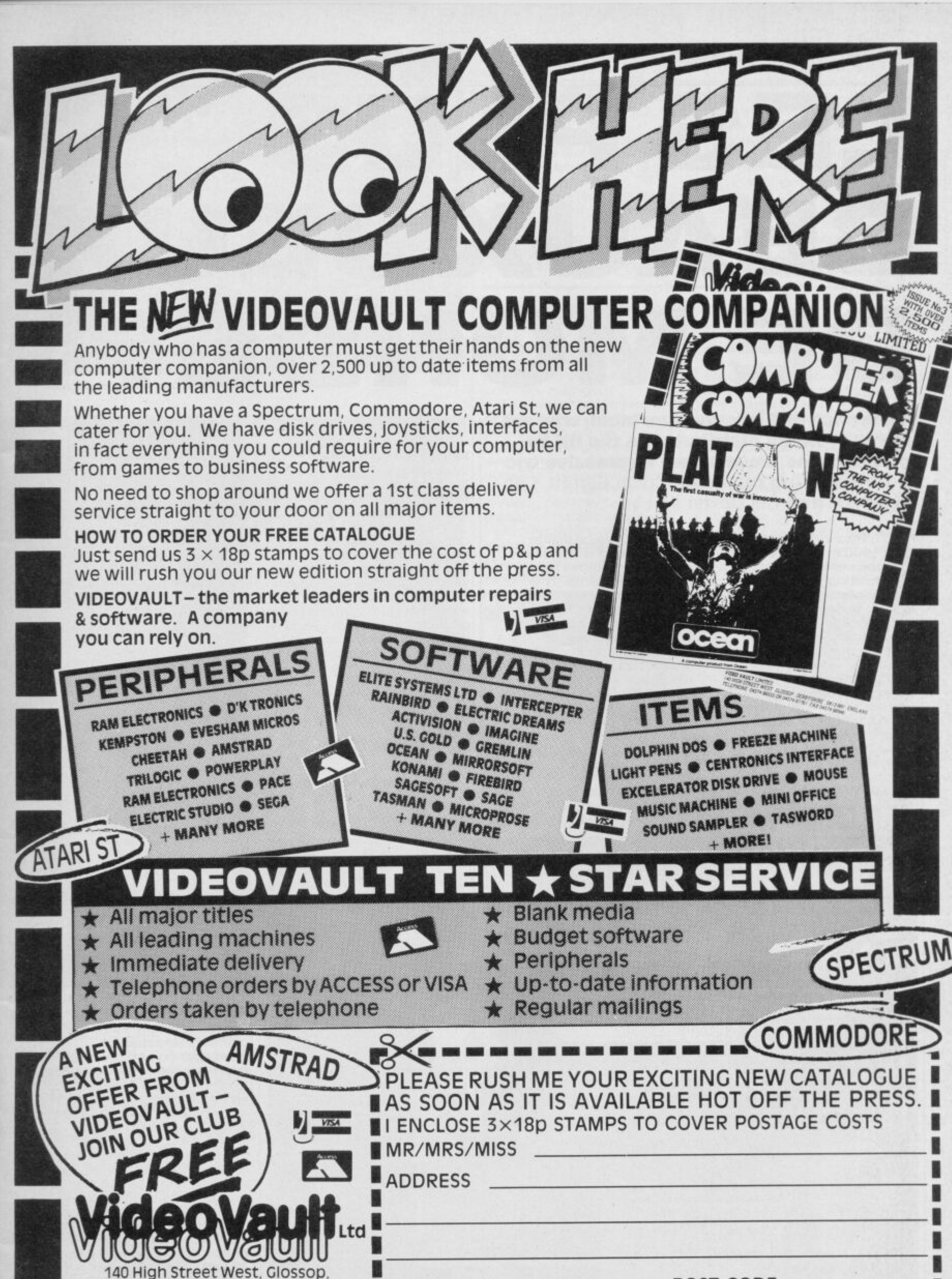
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LES PLUS BEAUX JEUX DE MONDE?

The French ERE Infomatique label, who are currently being distributed in the UK by Infogrammes, have a very impressive trio of forthcoming releases: Crash Garrett, Captain Blood **and** Get Dexter II **. . .**

SET during the late 1930's, *Crash Garrett* throws the player into a melting pot of espionage and intrigue. Europe is declining steadily into chaos and Nazi spy networks are gradually seeping through into America.

The action takes place over two days in May 1938, and starts with Crash Garrett flying Cynthia Sleaze, a gossip columnist from Hollywood, to the town of Lone Pine. The flight seems fine, but something nasty is about to happen . . .

The player is Crash's 'internal friend' – a strange, but helpful voice inside Crash's head which offers advice and guides him through the game. The action is continuous and is displayed as static scenes with speech bubbles. As Crash progresses, the scenery changes and other characters appear and disappear from view when necessary.

Both the graphics and sound are very impressive, with a sleazy sampled saxophone tune on the title screen, and superb comic-strip scenes.

Crash Garrett is available soon on the Amiga and Atari ST both priced £24.95.

AYE AYE CAP'N

FROM the 30's, ERE Infomatique take us to the far-flung future with *Captain Blood*, an arcade exploration adventure.

The plot follows a fellow called Bob Blood, who believes the universe is about to be attacked by yellow Pac-Men and Space Invaders. His delusions are such that he programs a giant computer simulation – based around a space ship called the Ark – to help him defeat the potential invasion. However, when the program is finished and ready to run, Bob gets sucked into the computer and actually becomes part of the simulation.



Pick a planet, any planet! Plenty of exploring potential in the Atari ST version



Allo! Le Francais version of *Crash Garrett*

The action is split into two sections: navigation and communication. First, a planet is selected for investigation and the ship hyperspaces to the required location. When it arrives, a small drone is sent down to the surface of the planet on a suicide mission to find alien life-forms. If contact is made, the player tries to extrapolate information about where parts of the potential invasion fleet may be found.

Captain Blood, like *Crash Garrett*, incorporates amazing visual and aural effects. The title music is sampled from Jean Michel Jarre's Zoolook album, and the graphics are very pretty



Amstrad *L'ange De Cristal*, better known as *Get Dexter II*

DEXTER STRIKES AGAIN

FOLLOWING on from the acclaimed *Get Dexter* is the imaginatively-named *Get Dexter II*.

The action features Dexter and his monopod side-kick Scooter, who first appeared two years ago in a colourful and highly entertaining 3D arcade adventure. The sequel is set in a new world, which is inhabited by some rather strange creatures. Playing Dexter, the objective is to solve three problems and then set out to find the Crystal Angel.

The game is first to appear on the Amstrad, with Amiga and Atari ST versions planned shortly after. We'll bring you the full Dexter story next issue.

KARNOV CONVERSION

SOON to be released on the Electric Dreams label is a conversion of Data East's coin-op, *Karnov*.

The player takes the role of the eponymous Karnov, a porky fire-breathing Russian, and guides him across nine horizontally scrolling levels in true *Ghosts 'n' Goblins* style.

Along the way there are a wealth of hazards to avoid, including sword-wielding maniacs, ferocious dragons, deadly ostriches and the most deadly of all – bloodthirsty killer biscuits! All is not bad however, as there are plenty of useful objects scattered around the landscape which are picked up and used against the revolting aggressors.

Karnov is scheduled for a March release – costing £9.99 for all cassette versions, and £14.99 for Amstrad and Commodore 64/128 disk.

A fire-breathing Ruskie is the hero in *Karnov*, Electric Dream's conversion of the Data East coin-op – Spectrum





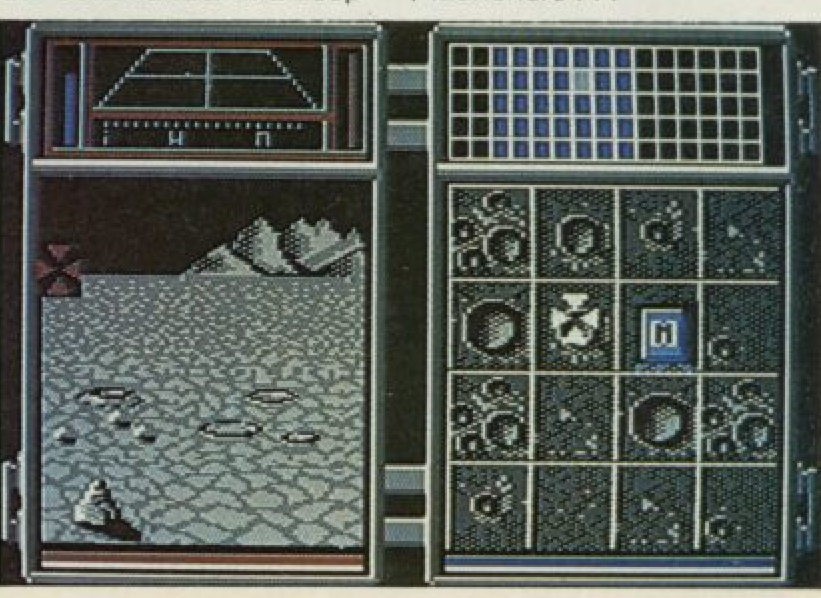
indeed. *Captain Blood* is scheduled to appear on the Amiga, Atari ST and PC – more news as and when we hear it.

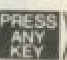
Captain Blood uses vector graphics to display the action, but they can be filled in when the spaceship is static – Atari ST



INTER-CORPORATE

CORPORATION is the name of a new action/ strategy game from Activision. The action is set in 3025 AD when the world is ruled by two Corporations, one of which you pledge your allegiance to. Playing the Commander of a deep space robotic mining team, the objective is to collect large amounts of precious Minorthian Crystal from an asteroid. However, problems are caused by the other Corporation who are also after the crystals – you may have to find out how to use the rocket launchers . . .




PRESS ANY KEY

IN THE AIR TONIGHT

INSPIRED by the 1930 Gee Bee racing planes, Steve Cartwright, who also wrote both *Hacker* programs and *Aliens* (the US version), has created a 3D air racing game. *Gee Bee Air Rally* features 16 first-person 3D courses which are raced around.

Set for a March release, *Gee Bee Air Rally* will be available on the Commodore 64/128, Spectrum, Amstrad and Amiga.

MASK RETURNS

GREMLIN GRAPHICS' third *Mask* game is soon to be available on the Spectrum, Commodore 64/128, Amstrad and MSX.

Dubbed *Venom Strikes Back*, it features Matt Tracker as he attempts to rescue his son Scott from the evil clutches of Miles Mayhem, the leader of Venom. Matt first breaks into Venom HQ, destroying as much of it as possible along the way, and then steals a rocket with which to battle Mayhem himself. More details when we have them . . .

TROLLING ALONG

OUTLAW are set to release their second product – *Troll*. Written by Denton Designs, it's promised to be 'a slice of pure arcade mayhem'.

Trapped in the netherworld of Narc, a weird wonderland of mirror images, you're set against hordes of goblins whose sole ambition is to send you crashing through one of their holes straight into another dimension – how nice.

Goblins above drop death-holes on top of you, but there's no real worry as you can jump onto the ceiling and continue the battle upside down. Out in Spring, *Troll* is set for release on Commodore 64/128, Spectrum and Amstrad.

PRESENTING THE EOA COLLECTION

ELECTRONIC ARTS have just announced a wealth of imminent releases.

First there's *Return to Atlantis*, an action-packed arcade adventure written by Mike Wallace. The objective is to find Atlantis, a task which requires the player to negotiate 14 different missions. With stereo sound and great graphics, *Return To Atlantis* looks like it could be quite a hit when it's released for the Amiga later this month.

Another imminent Amiga release is *Seven Cities of Gold*, an exploration adventure game. The story tells of the Spanish exploration of the New World, based upon the tale of seven Bishops who each established a beautiful kingdom there.

Taking the role of an Old World adventurer, the player sets sail on the trail of their hidden gold mines. Using navigational skills the ship is guided around North and South America where all manner of hazards and adventures await.

Following the recent release of *Test Drive*, Electronic Arts are set to release another two Accolade products. *Power At Sea* re-creates the World War II Naval battle of Leyte Gulf. The player assumes the role of Captain of the US Fleet with the task of entering and securing the Gulf, which is currently under enemy control.

Heavily strategy-based, *Power At Sea* also incorporates four arcade warfare sequences – ship to ship, ship to air, air to ship, and ship to land. While not attacking the enemy, the action shifts to the bridge where the player oversees navigation, communications, fleet status and weapons operations.

Power at Sea is available at the end of the month on the Commodore 64/128 at £14.95 on disk and £9.95 on cassette.

Also from Accolade is *Card Sharks*, which gives the player the opportunity to participate in games of poker, black jack and hearts against three computer opponents. Out on the Commodore 64/128 soon, costing £9.95 for cassette and £14.95 for disk.



Plenty of entertainment is provided by the locals when you *Return to Atlantis* – Atari ST

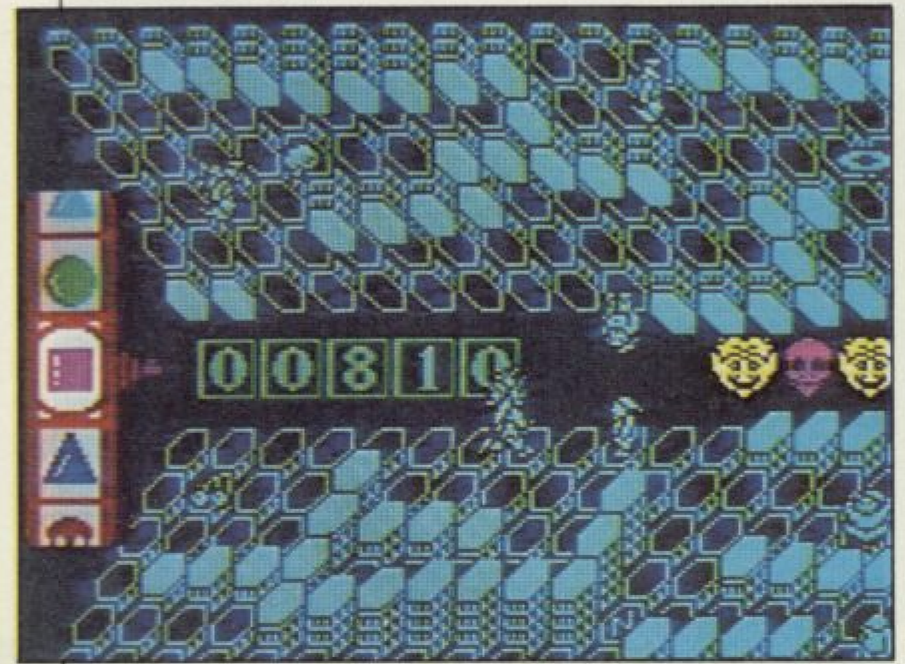


On the hunt for lost treasure in EOA's *Seven Cities of Gold* – Amiga

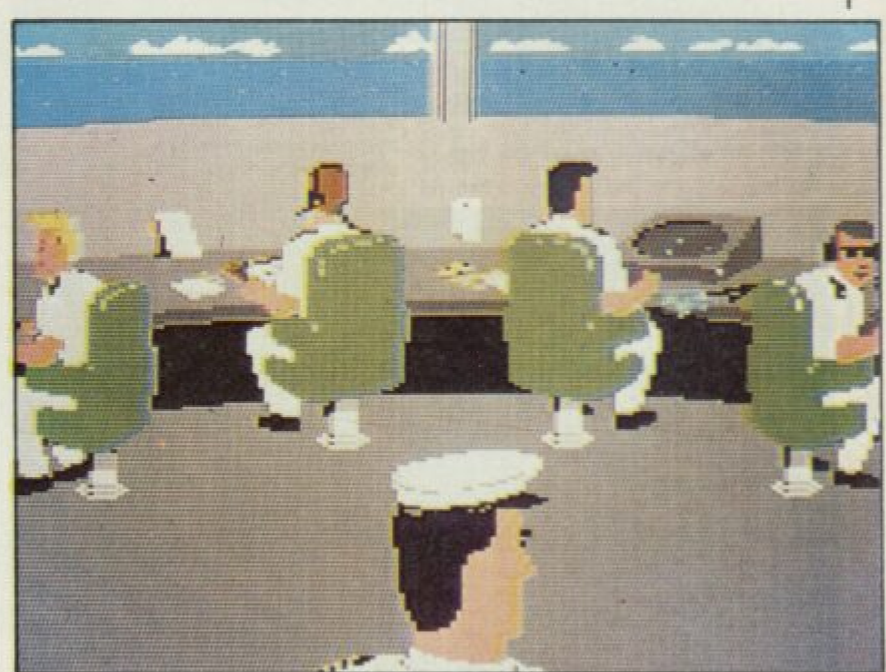


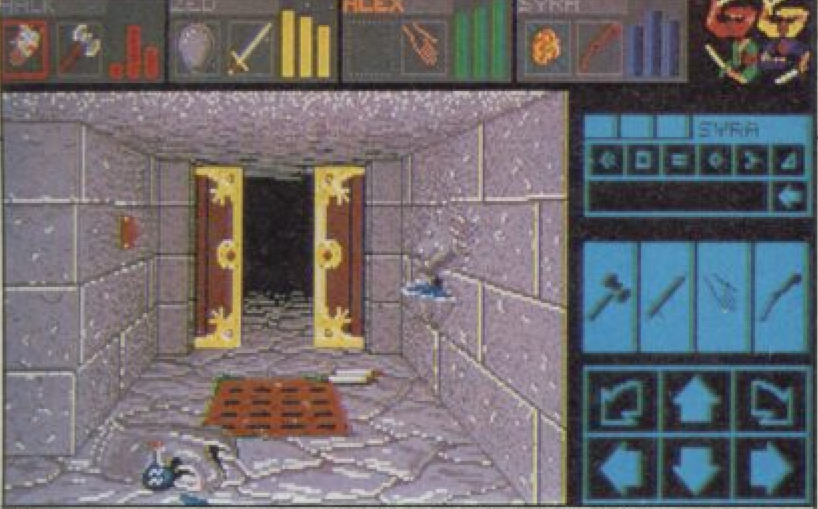
Fancy a round of Poker? Try *Card Sharks* from Electronic Arts – Commodore 64/128

Designed by Denton Designs, *Troll* is soon to be released on the Outlaw label – Spectrum screen



On the bridge in *Power At Sea* – Commodore 64/128





The role playing computer game that's taking Germany by storm – *Dungeon Master* on the Atari ST

MIRROR, MIRROR

MIRRORSOFT have several new releases in the pipeline. Potentially the most exciting is Cinemaware's Amiga version of **The Three Stooges**, which stars the irrepressible Curly, Moe and Larry. The graphics, as you would expect from Cinemaware, are truly magnificent. Stunning digitised pictures and some gorgeous animation makes watching a game in progress as entertaining as playing it. There's a fair amount of speech too, which has been sampled from the original films and adds greatly to the whole experience.

The actual gameplay revolves around the trio's fevered attempts to make money, and includes such crazy schemes as boxing and custard pie fights! The full story of their escapades should appear in the next issue of THE GAMES MACHINE.

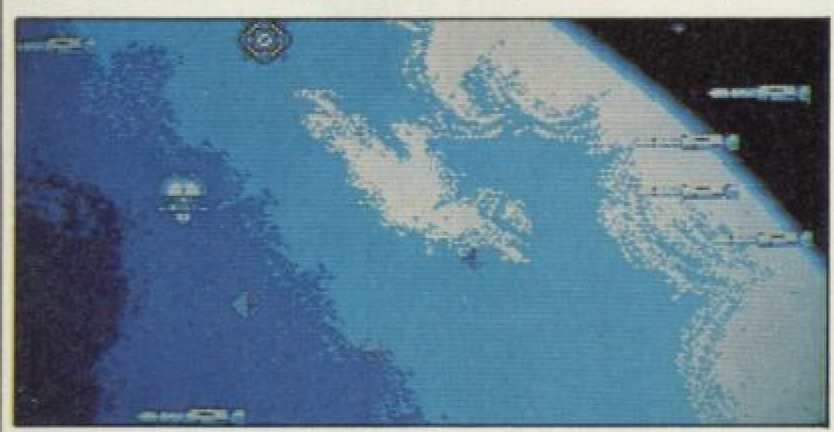
Mirrorsoft have recently teamed up with Spectrum Holobyte, an American software house who are about to launch one of the most spectacular flight simulators yet seen. Initially available on the PC and Mac, it's called **Falcon** and is a simulation of an F-16 fighter plane. The attention to detail is most noteworthy: the head-up display is practically identical to that of the real thing! There's really too much to explain at this stage – just expect something really special. Later additions should include versions for Amiga, ST and possibly some 8–bit formats.



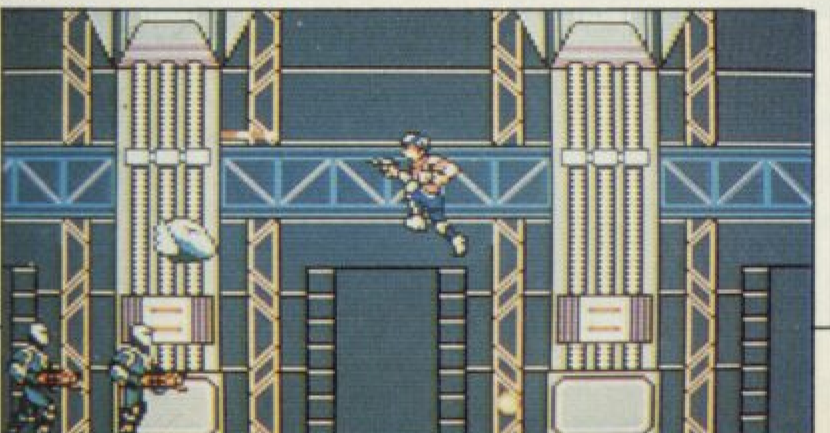
The best flight simulator ever?

FTL are a German company who also fall under the distributive banner of Mirrorsoft. They've produced possibly the best graphical role-playing game to date, and following rave reviews in the German computer press, **Dungeon Master** is soon to be released on the Atari ST in this country. Conversions to other formats are planned later this year.

Sega's new *Global Defence*, similar in many ways to the *SDI* coin-op



Zillion II, the sequel to *Zillion* (reviewed this issue) is available on the Sega very soon



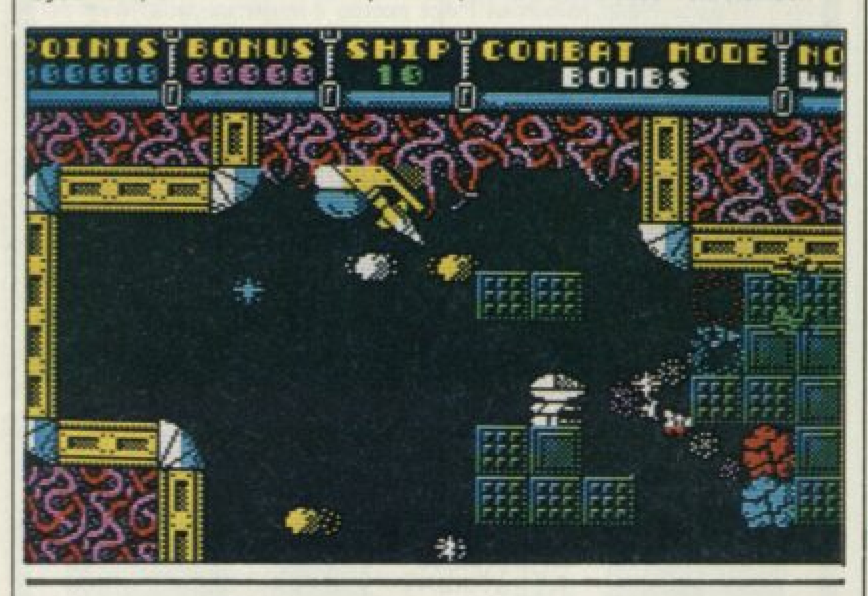
PSYCHO CYBERNOID

THIS spring marks the return of Raffaele Cecco to our Spectrum screens. His previous title, **Exolon**, was favourably received and his latest game, **Cybernoid**, looks like being a worthy successor.

The Cybernoid of the title blasts his way across horizontally scrolling screens, depicted in much the same graphic style as **Exolon**. Weaponry is collected along the way, and some of it is pretty bizarre, including such strange equipment as climber blasters, laser bouncers and horizontal beamers . . .

Out for the Spectrum, Commodore 64/128 and Amstrad in early March, TGM will be reporting as soon as possible.

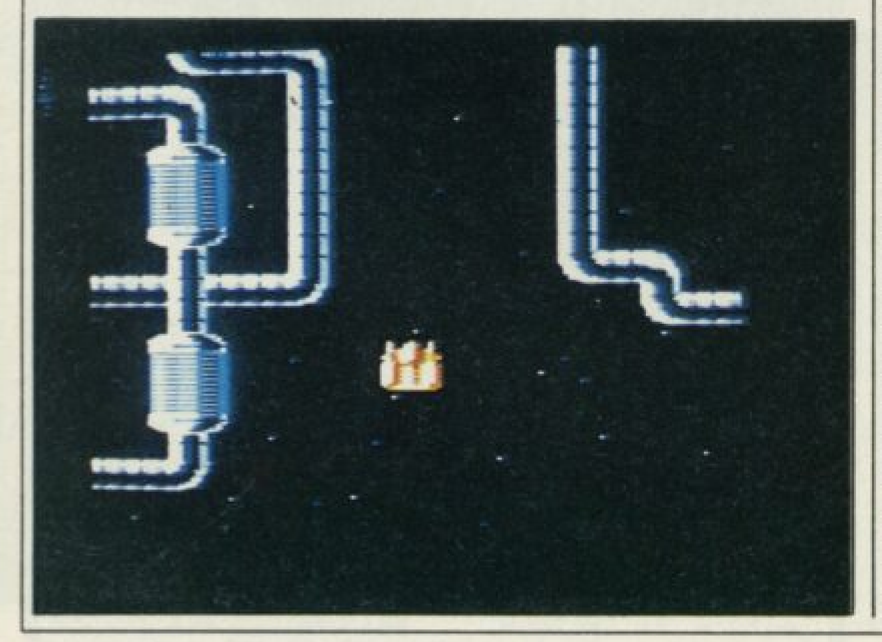
Cybernoid, shown here on the Spectrum, is the new release from Hewson



Starways is one of the forthcoming Amiga releases from Diamond Games



Entering another level in Databyte's shoot 'em up, Task III – Commodore C64/128



MULTI TASKING

TASK III is the name of a new release from Databyte, which signals their first venture into European games: all previous offerings have been distributed under licence from American companies.

Task III is a frenetic shoot 'em up played across 16 levels of smooth scrolling action and is to be released on the Commodore 64/128 in the near future.



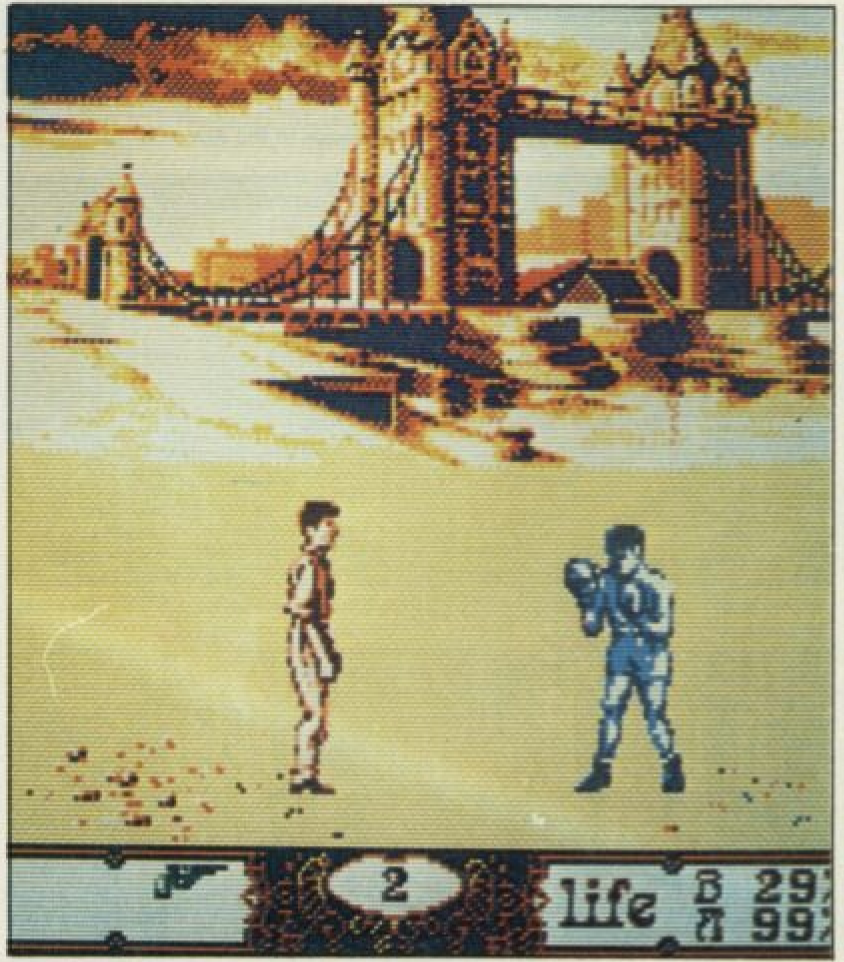
Cruel Vision – just one of the screens from *Frightmare*, the new release from Cascade – Commodore 64/128

FRIGHT NIGHT

CASCADE have something up their sleeves more suited to late October than Spring: it's called **Frightmare** and should be out on the streets by the time you read this. Initially available on the Commodore 64/128, **Frightmare** is a multi-screen platform game split into four zones – the graveyard, bones and bodies, the torture chamber and finally the laboratory. The action begins at midnight and the objective is simply to survive until 8:00 the next morning.

Frightmare has also been earmarked for release on the Spectrum, Amstrad and later, the PC. March should also see Cascade's other new game **Ringwars** – but more news of that next month.

New from Loriciels is Bob Winner, a combat exploration game – Atari ST



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INDUSTRIAL CHILD ABUSE

We've all read the hype – 'Whizzkid computer programmer buys Ferrari, but is too young to hold a driving licence.' We've all seen the advert, 'Do you sincerely want to be rich, famous and make it with the opposite sex? Then send us your programs.' We've all witnessed the bankruptcies, 'Sillysodsoft goes bust owing half a million. Duane Bimbo, aged 14, doesn't receive a penny for writing megahit game.' And we've all shrugged our shoulders and mused that there's one born every minute.

In a cut-throat industry that employs programmers who are legally too young to sign a contract, who are too old for nappies but too immature to shave, who think that fame and fortune are free gifts and whose experience ranges from the playground to the television screen, there are bound to be casualties. Exploitation takes several forms; withholding of money, destruction of self-respect, damage to reputation, horrendous and illegal working hours and supply of alcohol or drugs to children. Cynical adults are hardly going to treat naive kids with respect, but time and time again the underage programmer is exploited with a ruthlessness that is, quite literally, criminal.

I've invited a few well-known programmers to talk frankly about their early experiences. I suppose that they're some of the 'lucky' ones, at least they had moments of glory, before reality hit them. But the price they had to pay was high. The following interviews are representative of what happens to underage programmers, and I assure you, gentle reader, that I've heard all of these stories time and time again. Only the names change. It's not my intention to open up old wounds or to act as a mechanism for private disputes and slag-off matches, and because everyone involved is still active within the business, I've decided to replace certain names with asterisks. That's what magazines normally do with swear words, after all.

Let's begin with a mature old gent of 18 named . . .

FERGUS McNEIL

MEL – Something happened to you in a toilet when you were 14. Tell us all the sordid details.

FERGUS – Ha! Ha! Ha! I name the guilty men – Limetree Marketing, now bankrupt. They offered me five hundred quid for all my programs, and everything I wrote for the next ten years, can you believe this? I took a day off school to go and see them. We met in Euston Station in the Superloo. I didn't know what a Superloo was. I do now.

MEL – Within a few months, when you were 15 years old, you'd written *Bored of the Rings*, and my old mate Ian Ellery told you to f*** off, right so far?

FERGUS – Almost, it already had a Sinclair User Classic, and we'd been doing well mail order with it, but yeah, Ian said f*** off. Then he changed his mind. As a matter of fact *Bored* went to a different outfit altogether, the guy in charge was frequently to be seen floating a few feet above the ground. Know what I mean?

MEL – He was a stilt walker?

FERGUS – Something like that. I was very young, very impressionable, I couldn't believe that they picked me up from the station in a car for God's sake. 'Just enjoy yourself and we'll pay you money' was the message I got. And that's what happened. Number One! 15% royalties, 15% retention, no advance. I became a little star overnight. It was great. I even got my first royalty cheque.

MEL – What did you buy?

FERGUS – A coffee machine, to keep me awake, because they wanted a sequel by Christmas. We wrote it in under a month from conception to master tape. Things were pretty weird even then. It actually got to the stage of threats of violence between certain owners of certain companies. We also got a £400 advance . . . Big Money! I didn't know any better. Everything was great except for one thing.

MEL – They went bust!

FERGUS – Exactly! It got to the point where we were expected to run a non-existent company. Manning the phones, doing the Microfairs, the PR, it was all brilliant stuff, but the money wasn't exactly coming in.

In his fourth investigation of the Software Industry, that well-known social-worker Uncle Mel turns his spotlight on the pitfalls and ripoffs faced by young programmers. Mel Croucher and the Editor want to make it clear that they remain neutral regarding the statements made in this investigation, and whilst taking its contributors' comments in good faith, accept no responsibility for their legal implications.

MEL – The contract?

FERGUS – Don't make me laugh. We were threatened, moral blackmail, then a certain person quit the country. ****** did a runner overnight. We went to another company on the rebound, and our next game flopped. God knows why – it got every accolade going, but it did really really badly. Pathetic. I could have done better myself. It fell apart. I had to start looking for advance payments just to cover myself.

MEL – Did you have any advice, or an accountant, a Limited Company, anything?

FERGUS – I still haven't, Mel. But I'm just about to get all that organised. My parents were worried about me being liable for things. It's taken me four years to wise up. You get bullshitted all the time. My next big mistake was to take on programming of a licensing deal in a set time. I practically killed myself.

MEL – What do you mean by that, honestly.

FERGUS – I'd just discovered Pro-Plus. Some sh**head said to me, 'If you take some of these, you'll be able to finish on time'. It was a very silly thing to do.

MEL – How old were you when you were being fed drugs?

FERGUS – About sixteen. The certain person tried to get me onto other stuff, but I've always been a good boy, Uncle Mel, I've never taken anything illegal, so I sit here in my ignorance saying that it's bad for you. I was getting suspicious, mind. I didn't sleep for about two weeks after finishing that program, I was so speeded up.

MEL – They pushed you too hard?

FERGUS – You're committed to something, you do it. I was also becoming a bit of an alcoholic at the time. It wasn't too much fun.

MEL – You said you didn't use drugs.

FERGUS – I said no illegal drugs. Alcohol was how I managed to keep going, the only chance for relaxation, too pissed to type. Going from bad to worse. This sounds a bit melodramatic really, but it was quite bad at the time. It was happening to loads of young programmers. The magazines are treating you like you're

PRESS ANY KEY

somebody worthwhile, you're not getting paid for it, they say 'come on Fergus, buy us a drink, cos you're f*** ing rich.' You keep up the appearance. You kid yourself that you'll get paid one day.
MEL – Who's buying lunch?
FERGUS – Me.
MEL – So I'm doing exactly the same to you.
FERGUS – No, I'm doing alright now, you're a friend anyway, so that's not fair. Besides you need the publicity you poor old sod, Mel Croucher folks, the man who started it all! Give him a job!! OK, basically, it was an awful lot of pressure. I wasn't ready for it. I couldn't handle it. They had to force me to program. I didn't look well.
MEL – You look well now, the love of a good woman does wonders.
FERGUS – I'm lucky to have her. I tried to keep up an act for the public, but I like the publicity. I loved the autograph hunters. I thought I was a rebel, but inside I just wanted someone to please give me a rest. Um . . .
MEL – How dare you eat, keep talking!
FERGUS – Sorry, Sir, I took a bit of badly needed time off. I'd dropped out of college by then. When I'd got myself back together I started to get four figure advances, nearly five figures to be honest. I looked at myself, I decided to run things like a business. Stop relying on other people's gear. Open a bank account.
MEL – Give THE GAMES MACHINE readers some words of wisdom. Suppose there's a kid out there with a good program.
FERGUS – Don't let the excitement of the moment get to you when someone shows interest. It's really exciting, but it blinds you to reality. Never sign anything on the spur of the moment, sleep on it. Shop around. Remain polite, but keep firm. Nine times out of ten some guy will put his arm round your shoulder after blinding you with glitz, and say something like 'so that's OK then, we agree.' And you sign, and you're dead, and your product is dead to you. When kids phone me up I say 'shop around', for God's sake don't say yes to someone who offers you pie in the sky. A kid must respect the software house, but they must also respect a 13-year old kid, who might turn in something good sometime in the future. Respect doesn't cost anything. Finally, only sign away the rights for a particular format for a particular country for a given advance. There's the merchandising, other formats, other countries, the book, the film . . .
MEL – The law suit.
FERGUS – You should know, Godfather.

Deep in the bowels of Corby lives a fellow called . . .

NEIL SCRIMGEOUR

. . . who writes adventures under the guise of Sigma Software Designs. He has gone into print suggesting that ripoffs and pitfalls could be challenged by the formation of a Computer Programmers' Union. I asked him to elaborate his ideas.
MEL – Programmers like Fergus McNeil have learned by their mistakes. Now they say that if only they had had some support and advice when they started out they could have avoided a lot of grief.
NEIL – Right. As programmers we need some sort of mechanism to exchange information about who's ripping people off, about what sort of advances can be expected, royalty rates and standard contracts.
MEL – But supposing you got several 'big names' to float this idea, and they managed to get organised. Then they decided that a rogue software house should be blacklisted. What is there to stop that software house from using even younger programmers, and swindling them.
NEIL – The power of the pen! Kids read the magazines, they'd get the information that way.
MEL – What about libel, slander? Would magazines print stuff like 'Programmers Union says Grungesoft are a bunch of cowboys'. Nobody welcomes lawsuits.
NEIL – There's no problem if it's true. When a software house fails to deliver, we all get hurt to a certain extent because the public gets a bit more disillusioned about the whole industry. The Advertising Standards Authority has no real teeth, only gums, so it can't do much apart from suck. I've already written about the Advertising Standards people carpeting a certain software house over a sports simulation that went missing. They said that the reason was the programmer had died!
MEL – That sounds reasonable to me.
NEIL – Trouble was the kid was still alive, and he had one hell of a time trying to convince other software houses that he had risen from the grave!
MEL – Which software house was this?
NEIL – Ocean.
MEL – OK. Name some more names.
NEIL – Central Solutions. That's a good example of what I'm trying to promote. When they were going under there was no easy way to warn off programmers who were still submitting stuff to them. But there's something called Adventure Contact which got itself organised and managed to get back the vast majority of adventures before the whole thing went down the tubes.
MEL – Yes, I see your point, but day to day would a Union Work? Who'd finance it?
NEIL – Many other leisure industries have a union, musicians, writers . . .
MEL – Prostitutes.
NEIL – Programmers are prostitutes to a certain extent. We go around saying that the software industry has come of age, and I'm saying that it's time we had an organisation to protect our interests. Not just for the hassles, but also for advice that would smooth the way for all concerned. A bit of courtesy from software houses wouldn't go amiss either.
MEL – Who's been discourteous to you?
NEIL – One outfit accepted an adventure from me. They even agreed a price. Then they wanted some graphics to go with the text. Alright, so I sent the goods and waited. And waited. It was September 1986. October, November. I kept phoning. December, January, no response at all, nothing. I asked them to return my program, they just didn't bother to come back.
MEL – It may surprise you, I got treated like that by those ladies of St Brides.

We go around saying that the software industry has come of age, and I'm saying that it's time we had an organisation to protect our interests.
NEIL SCRIMGEOUR

It took me a long time to get the next young man to talk to me, and I don't think I've ever conducted a more disturbing interview with someone in games software. By the end of it I'll admit that we were both in bits. He asked me not to use his real name, not because he is ashamed of what happened to him, but because he doesn't want his parents to be hurt any more. I'll call him . . .

JOE

MEL – Tell me what happened in 1983, why did you quit school?
JOE – I didn't exactly quit, I just reckoned that I didn't need to go to university to make it, so I didn't go back to take my A levels.
MEL – What do you mean 'make it'? What happened in '83?
JOE – I'd written a few games on the Spectrum, and I sold them mail order, advertising in the back of Pop Comp Weekly. I used to copy them by hand, tape to tape, and photocopy the instructions down the library. Suddenly I was making a few quid, quite a few actually. I used to read about other programmers making it, and I knew I was as good as them, I used to read about people like you, and see you all at the Microfairs, with kids throwing money at you. I got talking to a few software houses at the Microfairs, and they all said yeah, great, let's have a look at your stuff. Then I got an offer from *******, who were mega at the time. It was all incredibly fast. I mean, all of a sudden it was me they were writing about in the mags.
MEL – I remember it very well, everyone said you had written a classic arcade game.
JOE – Yeah. That's what they said. It sold squillions.
MEL – Did you have a contract?
JOE – You must be joking! I didn't know what a contract was, then they wrote me a couple of cheques for what I thought was a bloody fortune. Looking back, they must have ripped me off for thousands. It wasn't money that did the damage . . . you know what I'm talking about . . . it wasn't that . . .
MEL – I presume that they wanted a follow-up from you.
JOE – They wanted more than one. They wanted as many as I could write, but it's not that easy you know. Programming is a doddle, but it's the ideas that are the problem. I didn't get any sleep for weeks, months, and I got into the drugs a bit. It was crazy, I'd give an interview full of gobshite about how great everything was, and what I was working on, and I'd go back to my cupboard and stare at the screen all night, like nothing was happening in my brain.
MEL – They knew you were using drugs?
JOE – Of course they knew! Half of them were out of their brains too, but they appeared so 'normal', it was me

who was paraded round like some sort of a circus freak. You want the truth . . .
MEL – If you want to tell me.
JOE – I wrote one great game. I ripped it off from a mainframe idea, but I did it on the Spectrum, and it was bloody good. Everything since then has been a complete lie, all the crap I've been saying about the stuff I'm working on, everything, one big lie. When ******* went bust I was left with nothing. I didn't have any rights to my own work, I didn't have any self-confidence, all I had was a head full of amphetamine sulphate and hope and f*** all else.
MEL – No question of getting back into education for a try at university?
JOE – I didn't even know what day it was, let alone what my options were. They bullshitted me along, making me work nights, weekends, letting me out of my cage now and again to go to a party or do an interview. And you know the sickest bit of all?
MEL – Well, I . . .
JOE – I had to get my Mum to sign the bit of paper which signed all my stuff away. I didn't even have a bleeding bank account. If . . . she ever knew she'd . . .
MEL – Look, I'm going to stop the tape.
JOE – What for? I've got no pride left.
MEL – Yeah, but maybe I'm exploiting you just like everyone else. That's what it feels like.
JOE – You haven't got a f***ing clue what it feels like, none of you. Why are you interviewing me anyway?
MEL – I'm not sure now. The idea was to warn, no, I mean the idea was to try and . . .
JOE – I'll write you a warning mate, 'be a programmer and let the f***ers crucify you'. How's that! Oh yeah, and never ever write a hit game . . .

Now and again I meet a young programmer, sweet-smelling and innocent, and offer my withered muscles for a leg-up into the wild frontier of computing. Enter

JAS AUSTIN

joint founder of Creative Reality, and author of such programs as *Slaine*, *War* and *Nemesis the Warlock*.
MEL – You were 14, you didn't know what you were worth (or how to program). Who was the first person ever to rip you off?
JAS – You were. You gave me a bag of jelly babies for a program, but you'd already eaten all the red ones. Actually, I remember very well what you paid. Twenty-five quid, outright fee, no royalties. Mind you, I don't know who came out worse, it was a crap game. Then I thought I was rich. You gave me £250 advance for the next one plus pathetic royalties.
MEL – I must be slipping! Royalties?
JAS – And at least we got them every month, which is more than anyone else ever did for us. Your last one, from Automata, was for £9.36!
MEL – I can't believe that nobody else ever paid you a royalty cheque.
JAS – I swear to you it's perfectly true. No royalties for three years. I was rolled, and didn't have a contract. Then I dossed about for a year, wrote a totally useless game, and ended up working for Dave Wainwright. I finished *War* between a Friday morning and the following Monday, 'cos I was pressurised and it 'had to be done'. Do you want this sandwich? It was here when I arrived. Wainwright put me on a weekly wage, so when I was working on *Tarzan* it took a year to program! I suppose you could say it was dragged out.
MEL – So you were ripping him off.
JAS – It was mutual. Nobody saw any royalties. When I did *War*, which was released through Martech, I actually made four figures. That was '86. No royalties of course. No contract. It was the same old story with *Nemesis*.
MEL – And did *Nemesis* take you a year?
JAS – Not quite. I started off at fifty quid a week, and got about £500 for *Nemesis*.
MEL – Total? That's a worse weekly rate than a Youth Training Scheme.
JAS – Total. For two versions. We didn't have a clue. I was at the mercy of other people, and couldn't figure out who was honest and who wasn't. It would have been really useful to have been able to talk to other programmers, discover if there was a blacklist of dodgy outfits. Now we get contracts. I've got a bank account. But all these stories you read about programmers making loads of money are simply not true. £250,000 for the bloke who wrote *The Sentinel*, you work that out in terms of sales needed to pay any sort of royalty – impossible!
MEL – Do you drive a Porsche?
JAS – Yeah, it's disguised as an Avenger and it cost £275. But when *The Fury* is a megahit I'll be able to afford a new one.
MEL – *The Fury*?
JAS – Our current game. The reason I'm drinking apple juice is because I'm driving. When I write I stick to coffee, never alcohol. Would you like another Old Knobb's Special, or whatever that muck is you're drinking.
MEL – Yes please. Have you ever ripped off someone even less experienced than yourself?
JAS – No, Creative Reality are angels. Er, well, to be honest we did once. I offered a programmer a lot less than we knew we could afford, but I felt really terrible about it. We upped it. I mean it's natural not to want to pay out any more than you have to, but we regretted our offer to him as soon as we said it, and it got put right. He was a good programmer and that made me feel even worse about it.

It's obvious that young people learn from the example of mature businessmen, and in the interests of balance I arranged to meet the aforementioned . . .

DAVE WAINWRIGHT

to explore his past and present attitude towards programmers.
MEL – You must be the tallest young programmer in the country Dave – about eight feet high, unless I'm shrinking.
DAVE – You're shrinking. But you knew me when I was three feet high. You were the first person ever to rip me off.
MEL – I had a feeling you were going to say that.

**To get anywhere in software you've got to get ripped off.
DAVE WAINWRIGHT**

DAVE – I was still at school, 15 or 16. You paid me eighty quid for translating *PiMania*.
MEL – But it started you off on your astoundingly successful business career.
DAVE – Oh sure, I went straight on the dole. Before I met you I was doing OK selling mail order, but the *PiMan* picked me up in a Co-op computer club that he was running, and nailed me to a desk. After, I went on the dole I wrote *Gisburne's Castle* and took it to Ocean. They lied to me about expenses – when I got there they said I wasn't getting anything. David Ward still owes me eighty quid from when he was Spectrum Games. They wanted me to sign a two year contract but I refused.
MEL – Why?
DAVE – My Dad advised me against it. Otherwise they'd have landed me. I was pleased with *Rampage*, *Supersprint* – I was pleased with quite a lot of my work. After I went to Martech I started abusing schoolchildren for myself.
MEL – I know you've not had any sleep for a few days, but you don't want me to put that into print do you?
DAVE – Why not, it's the truth. I think I've ripped off every programmer in Portsmouth, but I've changed now that my business has expanded, I'm ripping them off all over the country! I've got five offices nationwide, thirty programmers, and a tame lawyer. I learned early on that payments don't lead to good programs. Programmers have to learn from their own mistakes, it's the only way. To get anywhere in software you've got to get ripped off before you learn anything.
MEL – That really is an incredible attitude, why are you telling me this?
DAVE – Because it's true. Look, I'm still being exploited today, by *******, it's the same with all the big companies. They don't give a toss about programmers, if we've got any food inside us, if our eyesight is short because of permanently staring into monitors, about anything. I've been on four hours sleep for the past few days now, and they couldn't care less.
MEL – OK, how do you get out of this situation?
DAVE – I'm going into publishing on my own, 'Wicked Software', something like that. Others produce crappy little games and tens of thousands of kids buy them.
MEL – And you are not going to do that? You've learned from your experience?
DAVE – You've got me wrong, Mel. That's exactly what I'm going to do.

**I'm ripping programmers off all over the country!
DAVE WAINWRIGHT**

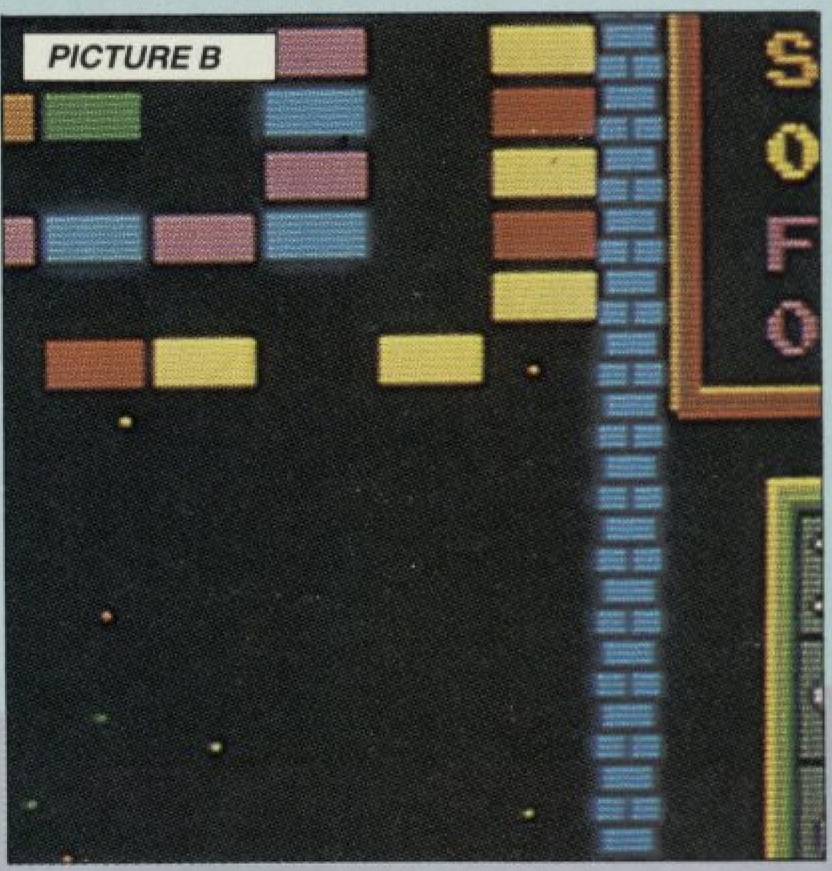
Do we need a Union of Computer Programmers? Who's going to make available Standard Contracts which clearly and simply set out terms of agreement between programmers and software houses? Where can young people find help and advice if they get into trouble over the exploitation of their programs? THE GAMES MACHINE opens its pages for your letters and comments.

NEXT ISSUE Mel investigates the Public Relations merchants, hype and the Charts. Rogues beware!

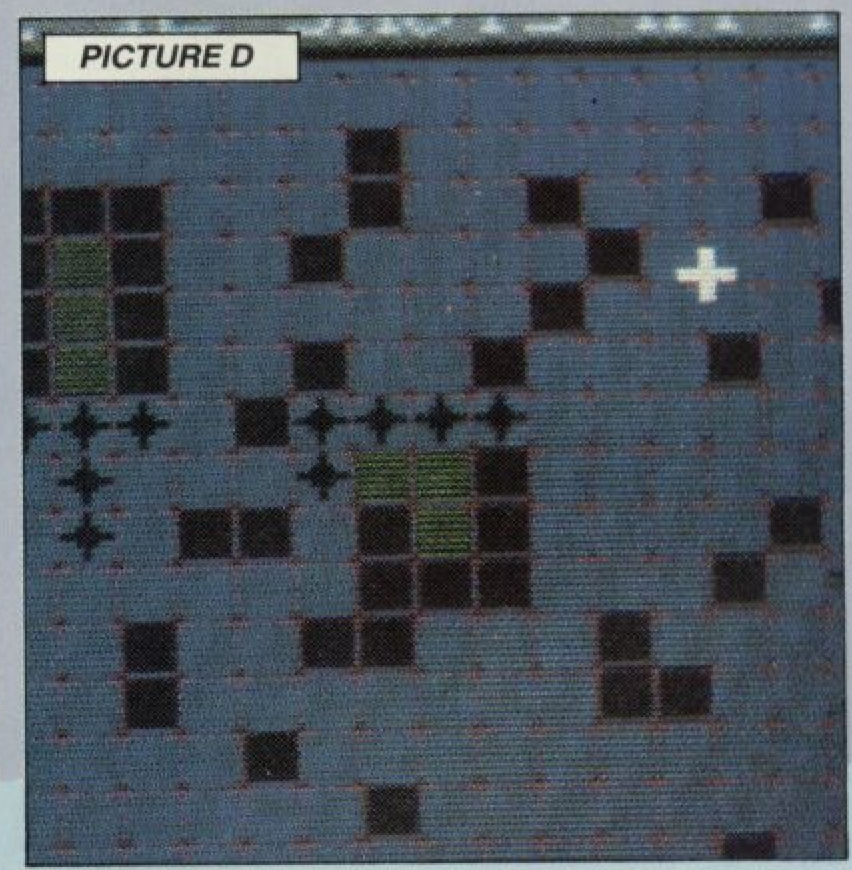
THE COMMODORE FLAGSHIP SAILS WITHIN YOUR GRASP AT LAST!

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The Amiga has already proven itself as an excellent machine for home computer use, and boasts an exciting range of supporting software which promises to get bigger and better.

To win this amazing computer, simply identify the Amiga games in the screen shots, mark the anagram of the title of the games shown and finally indicate the corresponding software house. All the games featured are taken from software previously covered in TGM, so with a bit of hunting around the answers shouldn't be too difficult to find. Send your entries to: AMIGA COMP, THE GAMES MACHINE, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE, SY8 1DB, to arrive no later than March 18th. If in any doubt check out the masthead for competition details.

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ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME ULTIMATELY PLAYING A RARE GAME

RARE — DESIGNS ON THE FUTURE

Ultimate Play The Game is probably the most famous label in the annals of British computer games. For over three years this mysterious company held absolute sway over the Spectrum charts, and then abruptly retreated and vanished, almost without trace. What happened to them? Was their elusiveness a media ploy? Timely questions, for the people behind Ultimate are about to rise spectacularly from their self-made ashes like phoenixes, and they chose to talk to THE GAMES MACHINE about their past and their resurrection.

Articles and Interview by Roger Kean and Nik Wild, Photographs by Cameron Pound (with thanks to Tim's Hasselblad)

GETTING A FOOT IN THE DOOR

During 1984 and 1985 Ultimate Play The Game, the trading name of Ashby Computers and Graphics, was the most sought after interview. Computer magazine journalists and editors clamoured over the phone, and even hammered at the front door, for that all-important exclusive interview. But the harder everyone tried, the more adamant Ultimate became about its press silence. The nearest anyone got to a foot in the door was CRASH. The magazine found some favour with Ultimate's nearly invisible owners, they ran several competitions and even promised an interview – but always only after the next game was completed, and somehow the interview never seemed to happen. Now, for the first time we can reveal some of the past secrets and, more importantly, provide an insight to the future – and the future looks like the Nintendo.

Sabrewulf **sales went over the 350,000 mark, besting Activision's** Ghostbusters.

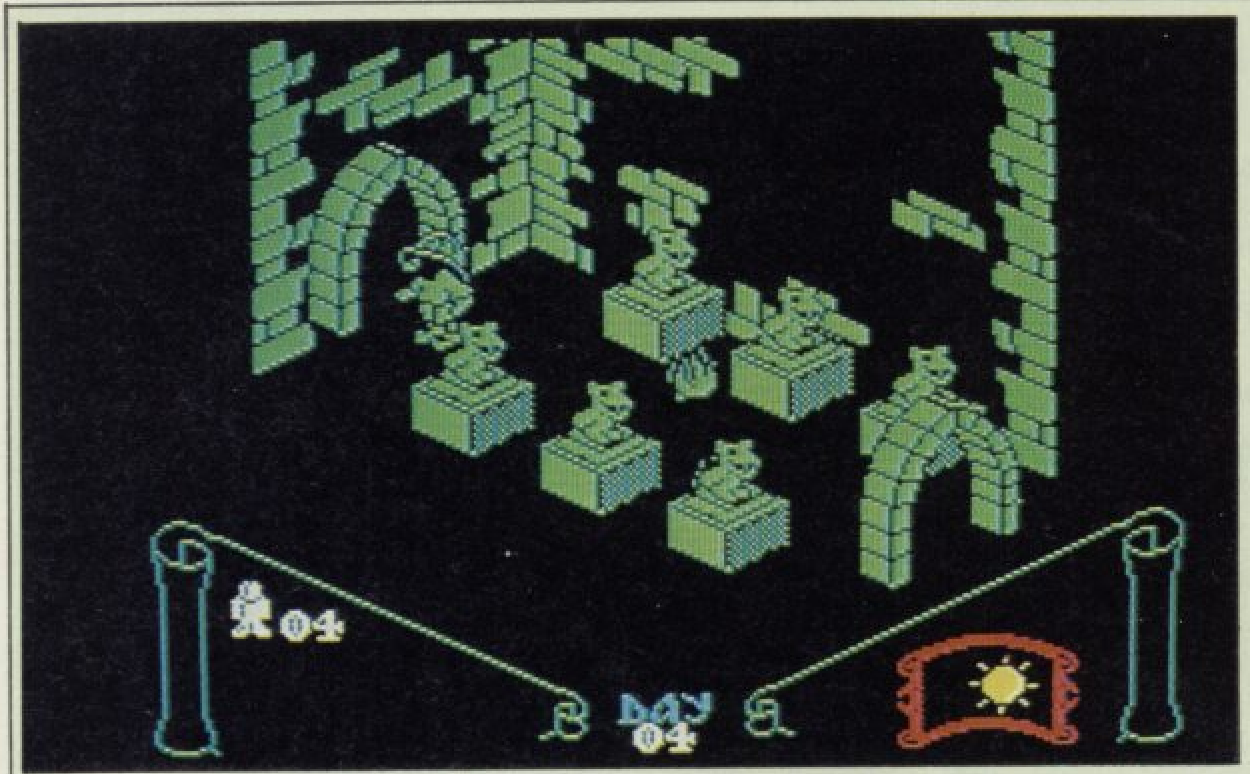
When, in the summer of 1983, two new Spectrum games called *Jetpac* and *Pssst* appeared quietly in the shops, it took only a few weeks for the name of Ultimate (Play The Game) to become a household software word. The packaging boast 'arcade quality graphics' was certainly nearest to being the truth for any game of the time, considering the Spectrum's display limitations; and the amount of gameplay and sheer fun to be had from either game was all the more astonishing for the fact that they were each packed into only 16K of memory.

Between 1983 and 1986 Ultimate had an unbroken chain of 14 Spectrum hit games, whose average overall rating (of those rated by CRASH) totalled 93%, making Ultimate the most successful software house of all time. During 1985 they turned, with less success, to the Commodore 64 market, releasing six games, the first two of which were massive hits. With *Sabrewulf*, probably Ultimate's best-selling game, Spectrum sales alone, they claim, went over the 350,000 mark – almost unheard of, and certainly besting the officially claimed 250,000 all-formats best-seller, Activision's *Ghostbusters*.

FILMATION

Very little was known about Ultimate. Unlike other software houses, the company never took stands at exhibitions (there was one early exception), never gave interviews and generally avoided any form of magazine coverage. It was frustrating to the numerous fans, and yet, magically, Ultimate avoided the oprobrium normally attached to stand-offish organisations in the





When is wolf not a wolf? When it's a Saberman - Spectrum screen.

entertainment field. It was as though the games really did speak for themselves. Each one was eagerly awaited, any delay resulted in magazines being flooded with complaining letters as though the editors could do something about the situation. When rumours circulated, originating from an all-too-rare (and all-too-sparse) press release, that *Knight Lore* was to feature an entirely new three-dimensional concept with superb animation called Filmation, anxious readers' letters ran riot.

And *Knight Lore* was revolutionary. It heralded a new genre, the forced perspective (or isometric) 3-D arcade adventure game; which, as one CRASH reader claimed, became the second most cloned piece of software after *Word Star*.

Ultimate ignored the other major home micro, the Commodore 64 until the very end of 1984, when to high expectations, adverts announcing *Staff Of Karnath* appeared. With a greater graphical capability at their disposal, Ultimate made a feast for the eye in an arcade adventure where 3-D really played a part. In mid-1985 they followed up with *Entombed* (a Gold Medal in ZZAP! 64).

ONCE-GREAT

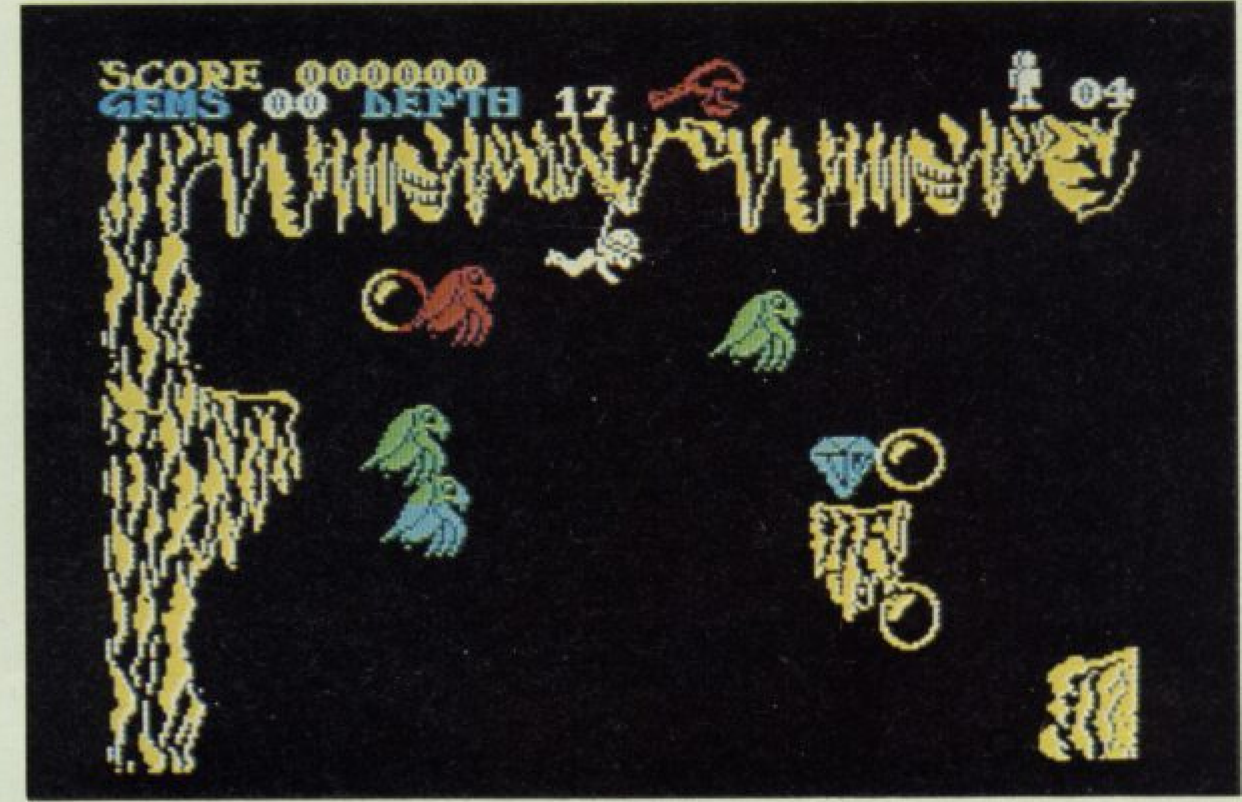
By the end of 1985 there were indications that the magic might be waning. Support failed first on the 64. The four games following *Entombed* bombed critically. Because they had always supported the Spectrum, and perhaps also because of the aura of veritable hero-worship that surrounded Ultimate, the company's profile remained good with Spectrum games until well into 1986. Something had gone, though; the flair seemed missing, had the originality ossified? we wondered, and letters kept sadly referring to the 'once-great software house'.

It was always a matter of professional speculation as to how long Ultimate could keep their supreme position and continue producing original games that would go straight to the top of the sales charts. Envy had been there from the start when, in early 1984, staff at Imagine, while condescendingly admitting the qualities of *Jetpac*, *Pssst*, *Cookie* and *Tranz-Am*, still felt stung enough to emphasise how much better *their* games were, reiterating that Ultimate scored because theirs were like arcade games, not deep enough to hold interest for long. *Atic Atac* may have been one in the eye for that accusation, but nevertheless, detractors almost eagerly awaited Ultimate's downfall.

Unlike other successful companies of the time, in keeping with its tradition of reclusiveness, Ultimate never advertised for programmers, it never joined forces with other software houses in associations like GOSH (Guild Of Software Houses) and never became part of the 1986 merger wars, although there were well-founded rumours at one point that British Telecom, in the guise of Firebird, had bought Ultimate. In fact Ultimate licensed two of its Spectrum hits, *Sabrewulf* and *Underwurlde* to Firebird for Commodore 64 conversions.

Then there was a rumour that Ocean had bought the company, and finally a confirmed notion that in fact it was US Gold that had won out. Nevertheless, the terms of the sale were obscured, Ultimate games continued to appear, though to less and less acclaim, and people wondered what had really happened. A clue, had anyone been able to penetrate the mists of corporate obscurantism, lay before all: the small, typically mysterious, concept and coding credit for some of the later titles – Rare Ltd.

A quick whip round for the ZZAP gold medal winner, Entombed - Commodore 64 screen shot.



A swinging time in Underwurlde - Spectrum screen.

A RARE INTERVIEW WITH



Ashby Computers and Graphics Ltd – the famous ACG of keys and amulets – based in the Leicestershire town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch – was wholly owned by one family: two brothers, Chris and Tim Stamper, and Tim's wife Carole. With one or two other programmers – or software engineers as they prefer to style them – this was the entire of Ultimate. At least all this was known to the enquiring public, so was the fact that the two brothers had started in the business as designers of real-life arcade machine programs – an exotic enough occupation in those heady early days, and considering just how many British-made arcade coin-ops there have ever been, still a past to be reckoned with. Two years ago, the Stampers formed Rare Ltd, sold off a minority interest of Ultimate to US Gold, moved from Ashby to the nearby village of Twycross, stopped programming Spectrum games, went to ground, and to all intents and purposes, disappeared. The following interview, recorded on a windy and gloomy December 17, goes a long way towards explaining what happened and why.

Twycross is a tiny Midlands village perched on the borders of Leicestershire and Warwickshire. Its main claim to fame is its reasonably well-known Zoo. Sitting on the western edge of the village is a large Queen Anne-period mansion, part of Manor Farm. This is the home of Rare Ltd, protected by rambling outbuildings, barns and numerous – and very noisy – cockerels and chickens. It is an elegant, though rather dilapidated, building, gradually being repaired by the Stampers. Its calm, very English-country exterior belies the power of the technology within.

The ground floor is a mixture of furnished, decorated and bare, untouched stone rooms. One of the first made habitable was the board room, where most of the interview took place, dominated by a row of clocks on the wall showing the different times in Japan and America – an indication of the Stampers' new market areas.

Tim Stamper, who looks after the graphics and was responsible for all the wonderful Ultimate packaging illustrations and on-screen images, is 26, fair-haired and more the business spokesman for the firm, although both brothers appear to be in complete accord about their direction. Chris Stamper, smaller, a bit quieter and darker-haired, is 29. He concentrates more on coding. But, as you might imagine from their arcade machine background, what illuminates their operation, is the intimate working knowledge of the hardware they use. Very little within the Rare building is as it came from the manufacturer, even the modest Amstrad PCs have been given vitamins.

TURNING POINT

At this, the first interview the Stampers have ever given, there were many questions burning to be asked; but I started with the most obvious: why did Ultimate disappear about a year and a half ago? Perched on the edge of the massive-desk, Tim thought for a moment and then offered a correction.

'I think for us, as the main development team, possibly two years ago was the time. It wasn't really conducive to company expansion to carry on producing on the Spectrum – unless we went along the budget route . . .'

The way his voice trailed off was sufficiently eloquent to need no further explanation. But surely this underlined the constant fear that



Not all, but most of the staff at Rare posed outside Manor Farmhouse. Left to right: Carole Stamper (company secretary), Tim Stamper (graphics director), Chris Stamper (software director), Rachel (secretary), David (sound department), Mark (software head), Paul (software), Steve (graphics), Kevin (graphics). Missing from the photograph is another Steve from the software department.

everyone had had that Ultimate could not keep up their run of successes for much longer. I wondered about some of the later, and more disappointing, games like *Bubbler* and *Cyberun*, and asked Tim when were they developed?

'It must have been 18 months ago.' Chris agreed with him – at least that. 'Really not really our involvement, they were developed by Ultimate engineers, trained and still functioning, but we concentrated two years ago on the Japanese markets and said, 'Ultimate if you're developing on the Spectrum, carry on doing that' – we're still the majority shareholders in Ultimate, so we still take an active interest in the company.'

'The last one we developed as a team,' added Chris, 'was *Gunfright*. That was the last one that Tim and myself did. Everyone was copying our *Knight Lore* concept, so we thought we'd do one as well – and get a little bit of the action!'

The Spectrum games were mostly huge hits, but there seemed to be some reluctance to get in on the Commodore 64. Did they never feel like working for the 64?

'We were interested in producing original games,' answered Tim promptly, 'and *people* wanted us to produce original product, so work for the 64 was really a job for somebody else. We could only have produced one type a year if we did all the conversions ourselves.'

But there was always a feeling that Ultimate never felt much like getting to grips with the 64, a supposition partly borne out by Chris: 'I never got to know it that much. You tend to focus on one area, and I think I was a Z80 programmer to start off with, and so I adopted the Spectrum. I had no trouble with 6502 or anything like that – the Nintendo 6502 – but I was working on the Spectrum and there were other people doing the 64.'

COPING WITH AD MANAGERS

The mention of other people working for them prompted me to ask how many employees Rare has. Tim told me 13. 'That's not including freelance teams. The company's fairly small. Most of the people here are development. We don't have any advertising people fortunately! Because we don't need to advertise.'

They advertised quite a bit in the old days, though, and I couldn't resist asking if it had been a bother having to cope with the mags bugging them to book space. Chris laughed wryly: 'It was a colossal problem, that was!'

But Tim was less adamant: 'It wasn't so much of a problem when we decided which magazines we were going to advertise in. It wasn't worth advertising in a magazine if you didn't get any return, otherwise you're just funding the magazine. Which is good for the magazine, but after all, it's not what we're here for. I think Newsfield were always good for us, that's why we contacted you now.'

'We never got on with a few of the other magazines,' said Chris.

Ultimate hardly ever talked to anyone, though. Was there ever a conscious policy to be hidden away and mysterious; was it seen as good PR?

'No it wasn't,' said Tim firmly, 'that's the way it turned out. We were so busy, having only three or four development staff in-house, and having to produce a few products a year, and making sure they were right. I think while we were full-time Ultimate, we only had two Christmas mornings off, that's how hard it was. We worked, as we do here now, seven days a week, eight til one or two in the morning (whenever the last engineer leaves!). But the rewards are there, and everyone's really prepared to knuckle down to get the rewards, like you've seen out there,' – pointing in the general direction of the parked Lamborghini – 'that's one of the rewards available, and if you want that you have to work to get it. I don't feel it's any good having engineers who only work nine to five because you get a nine-to-five game, you need real input.'

PLENTY OF FANS

So no time for interviews. Most computer journalists at some time or other must remember the famous 'Mr Stamper is in a meeting, he will call you back (next century)' telephone answer. But if they weren't present for the press, they were never there for the public either. Except for one very early computer show, had they ever been present at any exhibitions?

'Oh yeah, we have,' said Tim, laughingly. 'We attend most of them anonymously! It was nice to be able to keep a low profile because otherwise you couldn't wander round watching the reactions of people playing particular products; which again is important. I think you get a true reaction if people think you're just one of the purchasers.'

But in spite of the low profile, Ultimate provoked tremendous response from fans, and as Tim pointed out, their cavalier attitude towards computer journos did not extend to the purchasers of their games. 'We had 50 or 60 letters a day, and it needed someone fully employed just to deal with this letter problem we had.

'I think we had an opportunity, though, to capitalise on the sort of fan club Ultimate created – so many people wanted more information on Ultimate, and sweatshirts and caps and that, and we could have said – because Ultimate *was* Ultimate Play The Game products – 'If you liked Ultimate: buy the games, buy the sweatshirts'. So I think we could have expanded like some companies did, with a large fan club and giveaways and posters to buy, but in fact we gave them all away. If anyone asked us for a sweatshirt or a cap we said, well you can have it – or posters. We were just interested in seeing the software out there and getting fair reviews.



One of the 'available rewards' for hard work: incongruous among the litter of farm machinery, sits Tim Stamper's custom-built Lamborghini.

"It wasn't conducive to company expansion to carry on producing on the Spectrum – unless we went along the budget route . . . "

GETTING FAIR REVIEWS

'Yes the 'mysterious' Ultimate thing was because we hadn't got the people to do it,' Tim went on. 'I think we were fairly inexperienced then in running a company – we certainly knew how to produce software, I think we were more experienced in that than anyone else, and that's what we could do, so that's what we did. I was contacted by so many magazine people and reporters that we just had a list of people I wanted to speak to from the magazines and software houses – I always spoke to CRASH, but never to many of the other magazines. I think CRASH worked, they always gave us fair reviews; and some of the other magazines we didn't advertise with – which was another problem with the industry, and I'm sure it's still there now – if we didn't advertise, the product got a bad review. I think that's a really crazy way

for it to be, but that's how it was. I was actually told by a few other companies that they thought the problem existed as well, but there was nothing tangible. So we steered clear of speaking to anyone, and if they liked the product great, and if they didn't then I wasn't bothered, because if the sales were there it meant people were buying it.'

Ultimate never indulged in exclusives – the method whereby a software house grants a particular magazine early sight of a new game in return for benefits such a cover illustration, or a prominent article on the grounds that the magazine is the only one to have the latest news. The Stampers never sent out review copies until the game was due in the shops, thus ensuring fair treatment for all. Organising it was a problem though, and the headaches were Tim's . . .

'I had to make sure the copies hit all the magazines exactly the same day. And with new releases – with a distributor – if they knew they were the first one, they would be up at six in the morning and on the phones to the other distributors and jumping their accounts . . . I hated that situation. And the day a product was released the phone would just be red hot. It was really bad.'

'I prefer it here without those sorts of pressures,' added Chris. 'The atmosphere for development we have in this place is excellent. It's a nice rural setting with chickens all over. It's a farmhouse and we want to keep it that way because it gives you something to refresh yourself. It's good for development rather than stuck in the middle of some suburb or city centre.'

THE PRICE SHOCK

After a run of six games priced £5.50, *Sabrewulf* was something of a shock when it appeared costing £9.95. I asked Tim whether he thought they were taking rather a gamble on their undoubted popularity at the time by almost doubling the cost of their games.

'We were having a severe problem with the number of (illegal) copies. And I think it was a bold step we took. The price of stuff was was gradually creeping up – Imagine set the price at £5.50, without a doubt – and it was gradually creeping up, and I thought we might go the whole way and put the product out at a price which was realistic for the time involved in creating it. £5.50 was a little low. Perhaps we could have sold more, but we were trying to create an incentive for the person who paid £9.95 to say, 'Hey you're not copying my game' – I mean, alright, they may have traded it for X number of pounds, but at least they said if you want it you buy it. And that was successful because we still kept the number one position for quite a while, and it didn't make any difference to sales.

'I think they were still good products for the time . . . I think possibly *Knight Lore* was ahead of its time, and in looking back at the market now, there doesn't seem to be any vast improvement in the two years since we left it. I don't know whether we could have made any more of an improvement.'

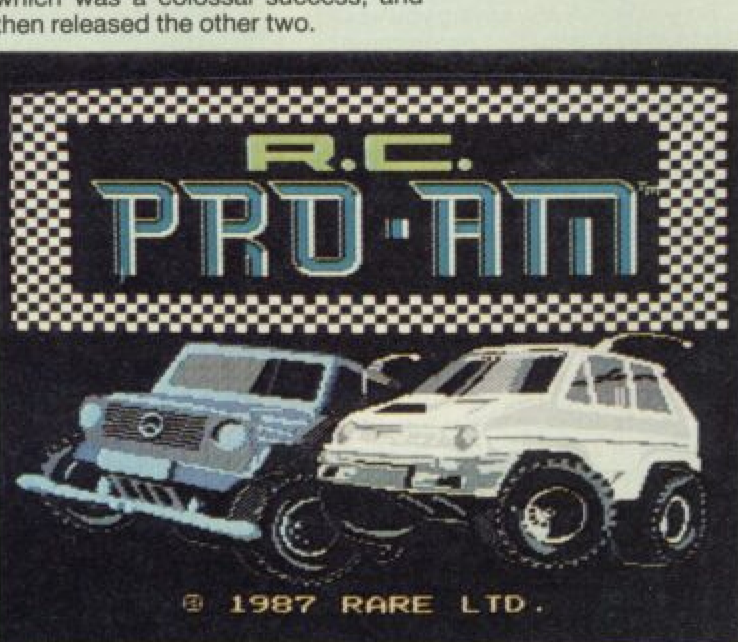
THE KNIGHT LORE SHOCK

The more I talked to the Stampers about their past, present and future, the more struck I became by their extraordinary, calm planning. But never more so than by what I was about to hear next; and this example indicates only too clearly the kind of long-term view they take, and took, and explains better than anything else the fact that Ultimate's 'demise' was no random accident of fate as we may all have imagined.

Yes, few people would argue that *Knight Lore* was ahead of its time, but in fact it was more ahead than anyone at the time ever dreamed. It was Tim who quietly dropped the bombshell that turned history upside-down:

'*Knight Lore* was finished before *Sabrewulf*. But we decided then that the market wasn't ready for it. Because if we released *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8* – which was already half-finished – we wouldn't have sold *Sabrewulf*. So we released *Sabrewulf*, which was a colossal success, and then released the other two.

" . . . we had two Christmas mornings off, that's how hard it was. We worked seven days a week, eight til one in the morning . . . "



The attractive title screen of* RC Pro-Am, *a good example of Tim Stamper's lively graphics.

' There was a little bit of careful planning in there. They could have had *Knight Lore* possibly the year earlier, but we just had to sit on it because everyone else was so far behind.'

In fact this startling piece of information fits well into Tim and Chris Stamper's basic philosophy about creation and marketing. I rapidly gathered that while they rate the level of British talent very highly, they hold a much lesser view of the corporate software houses when it comes to seeing the big picture. Tim again: 'There are a few really good companies out there – Jeff Minter, we would have loved to have had him with us, he has a lot of talent – but it always seems to be misdirected. You occasionally see a really amazing game for the time and you think, Christ, it kills the games after; and if they had had a little careful planning they would have avoided that. It's bad for the industry.

'Games should be developed and be released at the correct time. And again, some games have been really good and were released too early and people haven't been able to appreciate them; or released too late and it's already been done. So I think careful planning there would sort that out.'

Chris cited the example of *Elite* (not the original BBC version), a game he rated very highly, as being one that actually might have killed off Firebird games sales after its release, because it raised expectations, and when nothing could match it for ages people felt let down.

'But that's how it is,' Tim said pragmatically. 'I think there's enough UK talent to rule the world on the arcade and home computer market, but it's not being really well directed. Hopefully we can solve a little bit of that, but there again, we're not that strong in UK. Very few people know we're here, very few people know what we're doing. And I'd just like to make people aware of the fact of the very large market out there and they can take advantage of it through us.'

TURNING TO JAPAN

Which brings us very neatly to what the Stampers have been doing in what has seemed to the rest of the world to be a sabbatical. But far from it, and again, it rests on a piece of information, staggering in its implications, casually dropped into the interview. It also makes very clear why Ultimate was to change direction so radically. All I asked was what machines they were now so busy programming for.

'Mainly the Nintendo. We had a Nintendo four years ago.'

I stopped Tim to question my hearing. *Four* years ago? Around the time they were conceiving *Lunar Jetman* and *Atic Atac*!? The first time I heard anything much about the Japanese wonder-machine was shortly before the 1986 PCW Show. But Tim confirmed the date, then added: 'Well Rare Ltd is already competing with the big names in Japan, Konami, Nintendo, Sega and Taito.

'When we got the machine, that was the beginning of Rare. We knew a market was going to boom in Japan and America and we set Rare up to handle that. Obviously we didn't want to give too much away because we needed time to develop our associations – which fortunately we managed to do – before everyone really became aware of it.

'We managed to get just about all the software available for it, and we're still receiving software now. And the machine, for the price it was available in Japan then, had colossal potential – we looked at this and we looked at the Spectrum – and then the Spectrum was hot stuff, but this was incredible. So we spent possibly eight months finding everything out about this system – it's custom chips, and it takes a fair bit of work – we managed to do that and then started to write on the machine.'

Chris added: 'There was no information on the Nintendo at all, but because of our previous arcade experience we had hardware knowledge of the arcade boards, and so a very shrewd idea of what that machine was. That enabled us to



produce the first product, and were able to make a presentation to Nintendo, and they said, 'Okay, you can do it' . . . '

' . . . 'And here's the information you already found out!',' quipped Tim, laughingly.

'It was a sort of introduction process. We had to show Nintendo that we had the capability before they could give us the rights to go ahead and produce for their system.'

I said I had heard that Nintendo are notably very finicky about their marketing deals for third-party software, a point Tim considered very understandable: 'They're a very big company. The majority of companies like Konami, Taito, construct a deal with Nintendo to produce a product for Nintendo to market it. But they are limited to the titles they can produce a year. We license product to Nintendo, and *we* are not limited to the number of titles. So that's why we are going to take advantage of the situation that we've got now, that we can produce an unlimited amount on that system, which no-one else has got at all. In fact we've licensed more product this year than any other company. So we're very proud. And I think it's an affluent market.'

It sounds it; with some 10 million machines in Japan, and 15 million worldwide, Rare enjoys sales of its licensed product there far higher than their highest ever British figures for Ultimate games. To date there are four original products on cartridge and two others just written for an outside party which will be shown at the CES in January. In addition, another eight are in development.

'We actually act, I suppose,' Tim added, 'as Nintendo's development team. If they feel they are lacking a product on a machine, they tell us, we develop it, and so we are sure of licensing product to them.'

So far, releases in Britain that THE GAMES MACHINE has seen have not resulted in much above average confidence. Have *they* been very impressed with the British Nintendo cartridge releases to date?

'No,' said Chris. 'I think Nintendo are so busy in the States, and I feel as soon as they resolve that problem the UK will receive the support it deserves. And when that happens Nintendo will take a much higher place. I think they're just so incredibly busy. It's going to be a banner year.'

Certainly, looking at some of the games Rare has just finished, it is going to be a great year for them. At about this point in the interview, we were beginning to get onto their real reason for granting it.

OF CARTRIDGES AND COIN-OPS

Having decided, several years back, that the Stampers' Ultimate had probably gone as far with the Spectrum as it was possible for them to go, and having receded quietly into the background to devote time to mastering the Nintendo system and producing their first games for it, they have now arrived at a point when, ironically, they could do with some publicity. Why?

'I think there are a lot of UK companies that are beginning to look overseas, and to look at machines which are not available in UK,' Chris began to explain. 'We did that two years ago. And it puts us in a very unusual situation. We have four freelance teams who are really trying to take advantage of the situations we developed. There is not another company in the UK that has the opportunities that we do at this stage, basically because it all takes time and we're two years ahead.'

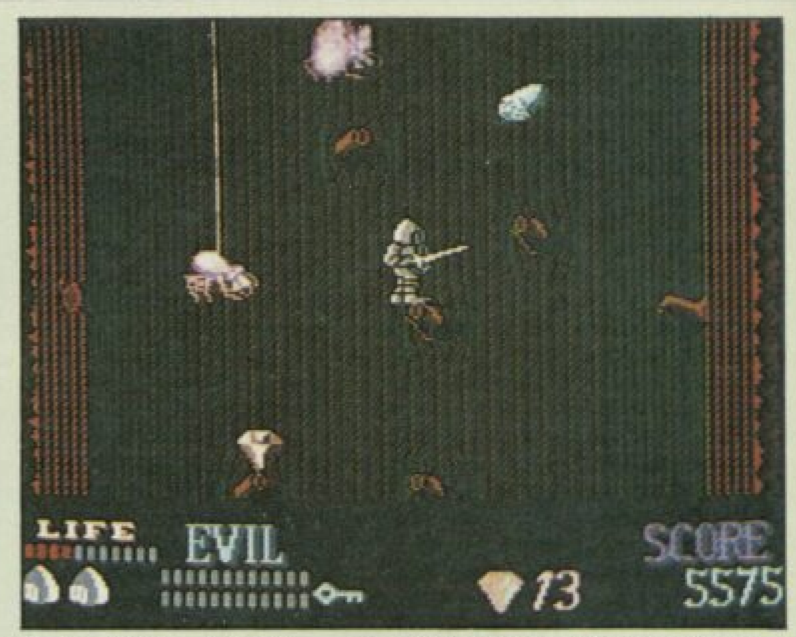
And it is that talent capable of ruling the world on the arcade and home computer market that the Stamper brothers are thinking of, they want to extend their advantageous position in the world market to other programmers – software engineers – and it was Chris who came out with the bald statement.

'It's so easy just to focus on your own little world and never look outside. Well we're out there, we've put in a lot of effort, we've made a lot of – not sacrifices – but not the best business deals just to gain a relationship, and I think now we're in a position to take advantage of that and we would like as many people as possible to come to Rare and see what we can offer.'

So you're actually saying you would like to start a recruiting programme?

'You're here to start it!' said Tim brightly. Chris expanded further:

'That's right. We try to get as many good engineers as possible – we're certainly looking for freelance teams. We've just finished designing our own arcade hardware, and, for the right team, we would be able to provide the hardware for them and then give them the opportunity to write for the coin-op market. That would certainly be a worthwhile gamble for any competent team to have a go at, because if they can get a product in at the top, and if it takes well in the arcades, it's going to filter down through Nintendo and all the other associated products. If you start only half way up the ladder, then there's only one way it's going to go afterwards and that's down. And it's very hard to get it converted up.'



***Inside a tall tree, the bold knight faces many foes in a situation not unlike Sabreman's adventures in* Underwurlde. *From* Wizards And Warriors.**

"The Japanese market's two years behind UK. It's easy to look at UK trends and see what the trends will be in Japan."

Tim had the last word on this subject, when he said: 'I'm pleased about the direction Rare is taking, because 100 percent of the revenue received by Rare comes from overseas, and I think that's good for UK and it's good for the image of British software in the world. I wish more people would take the incentive and do exactly the same as we did.'

TRAVEL AND THE JAPANESE STYLE

With all the work they do for Nintendo, I wondered whether they have to travel a lot. Are they in Japan every other weekend?

'No,' said Tim, 'not Japan, usually to the States. We do most of our dealings with Japan through the States. We have an associated company called Rare Coin-It. The Coin-It companies are mainly arcade, and ours is an exclusive arrangement, and that gives us a base in the States. Plus the fact that most of the big

***Another screen from* Wizards And Warriors.**



Japanese companies have built offices in the States, and they speak the same language as us, and the food's better!'

Traditionally coin-op themes have travelled from Japan, often via America, to arrive in Britain. It has hardly ever happened the other way round. Is that because British games are not suited to the Japanese, or even American, mind? And if there is a difference, how have they at Rare overcome the problem? Chris: 'I think when we look at British games now we can understand the difficulties that UK companies will face trying to get into the market, because there *is* a difference in style and there *is* a difference in what makes a good game for the US and Japan. And I think we understand now what that difference is. Our success rate proves it – that and the fact that we *have* licensed cartridge games.

'When we first started in the arcade market quite some time ago, we found we were very good at producing games which did very well in the UK and that was it.'

"We knew a market was going to boom in Japan and America and we set Rare up to handle that."

PLAYER 1

STEEP PEAK
QUALIFYING RUN

SLALOM

Slalom's Mount Nasty looms above the player, beckoning you to choose a route.

Tim took up the story: 'It seems that Japanese games sell very well in America and American games sell well In japan, and in England, but English games don't do well in America and they don't do well in Japan. It's taken us a few years just to find out why. Even Japanese and American conversions wouldn't sell well in America because they're converted to suit the English taste. There's a big difference, and obviously English teams have not discovered what the difference is.'

'We must realise that the Japanese produce the number one games and they always have done,' Chris went on. 'I find it surprising that with all the talent in the UK, it isn't British companies producing the number one arcade games and then everyone in the world following that. Because Britain's got the best talent without a doubt. This country's very conducive to that – it's cold, it's damp and everyone's sitting indoors programming – *we* should be producing the number one games, and it's not happening. Rare is the only company beginning to get somewhere towards that.'

And as Tim pointed out, it is only through examining Japanese-made games and then putting the theory into practice through their painstakingly built contacts that they have reached the point they have. 'Throughout our arcade career, we must have licensed 16 or 17 products to Japan, and every time they've asked for more, and after doing so many do you think, I know exactly what they want now, and then you can produce games that you know will suit their taste. It's taken a long time to do it, and indeed we're trying to train all of our engineers to realise the difference.'

"We try to get as many good engineers as possible – we're certainly looking for freelance teams."

But paradoxically, Tim and Chris believe Japanese tastes in game themes follow the British. Tim: 'The Japanese market's possibly two years behind UK. It's easy to look at UK trends and see what the trends will be in Japan. They've just had a really really big arcade adventure type. I think they're possibly just getting on to the sports aspect now, which is where we were at a while ago.'

THE SYSTEM OF THE FUTURE?

Turning from the orient to western concerns, I asked whether we would be seeing any Rare games for the 16-bit computers, and promptly ran up against the Stampers' scepticism of catering for a market whose sales do not yet run into the hundreds of thousands.

'When we find a machine that sells extremely well to warrant us producing on it,' said Tim, 'then we'll produce for it. If a 16-bit machine is going to sell about three or four million, you can be sure we'll be out with there product for it. But if it sells 250,000 . . . I don't think any 16-bit owner is going to buy two of one product, so the maximum you can sell, if you reach 100 percent of users, is 250,000.' He shrugged eloquently: ' When we've got over 10 million Nintendo units in Japan . . . '

So no Ultimate-style Rare games for the Amiga and Atari ST?

'We do have those machines around, but we do focus on the Japanese machines, mainly because of the numbers that are out there,' Chris replied. And Tim went on to explain that, rather like the problem encountered with converting Spectrum to Commodore 64, they would need to train people to do the 16-bit conversions in-house. 'If we didn't handle the conversion ourselves, I'm sure it would turn out differently. I think if we can train enough people to produce for us, rather than license another company outside to produce, we should get somewhere there – if the machine sales are really good. But I think you *will* see conversions of our products on certain machines.

'The trouble with most of those machines is that they have got incredible graphics and sound, but the processor is just ticking over – you can't do anything really stunning with it.'

Chris agreed: 'I'm surprised that we haven't seen any incredible games on the 16-bit machines. But a game's so slow with disk option, terribly slow and boring. That's one of the major advantages of Nintendo, just just bang in a cartridge, and if you don't want it, you bang in another. You can play through 60 games in a few minutes! And the cartridge sizes on the Nintendo now are quite colossal, there are two megabyte games. It's a fair-size game. And the price of memory is coming down all the time, especially just the silicon chip. I think it's the system of the future.'

PAST AND FUTURE

Tim and Chris Stamper have always planned for their future. They refuse to get stuck in any ruts, and wholeheartedly refuse to be merely what people expect of them. And indeed, they were unexpectedly generous and patient – considering their press reputation – but they clearly do not tolerate fools easily. They have resisted the temptation be be drawn into the razzamatazz of public shows, and yet have been unfailingly helpful to members of the public who, having got the Ultimate phone number, rang up in the old days, usually receiving a T-shirt, sweatshirt or cap for their trouble.

In short, they've been successful, so I asked Chris whether there had ever been any regrets. After a short hesitation he replied: 'I think the thing we regretted the most was not doing *Atic Atac II* when we did number one. We should have done that because it was so well accepted and it sold so well, and for some reason we didn't and I don't understand why.'

In retrospect it seems a harmless enough sorrow to bear, and one suspects there are probably numerous other problems they have suffered which are just forgotten in the onward rush. Rare doesn't strike as being an express train of ideas on the verge of being out of control, but rather a streamlined sports car in the hands of a capable and determined driver with his eyes on the road ahead. Outside, there is a vast barn in good repair. It is the next stage of development and will be refitted with studio gantry lighting. In its spacious interior, the Stampers intend to build what might well be the world's first computer graphic film studio. They believe that with silicon technology as it is, with the ever decreasing cost of memory and flat cathode ray TV screens, real movies done by computers are just around their corner.

The past is the platform from which they build, but not a temple to their success to be enshrined. Of the many ways in which Rare differs from other software houses I have visited, one of the most striking was the lack of old artwork, framed, and hanging on the office walls. When I commented on this, Tim Stamper replied typically. 'When you've spent five to six months developing a game, you've really seen enough of it. You fulfill your aim and then you go onto the next product. I think our best product is yet to come. I probably haven't even got a full set of Ultimate games here. They just disappear! Anyway, we're all looking to the future for what we can produce, and that's where the excitement lies for us. It's not worth looking back. I'd like to hang pictures of games we *will* produce on the walls.'



RARENGINEERING

The programming – or engineering – area is on the first floor of the large Rare headquarters. The first room is Tim Stamper's graphics office, equipped with several computers, two large drawing boards – one bearing a giant game logo being prepared in expanded pixel form with a title we are not allowed to mention – a video area with studio lights to help with digitising complex three-dimensional shapes and a closed rack containing all the past, famous Ultimate packaging illustrations.

It was in Tim's graphics area that Cameron photographed screens of three of the games Rare has already finished for Japan, one as long as two years ago. For some 40 minutes he crouched under a long black shroud stretching from camera to monitor (intended to keep stray light off the screen), while Chris knelt in front of the set, ducking his head out of the camera's way, playing the games.

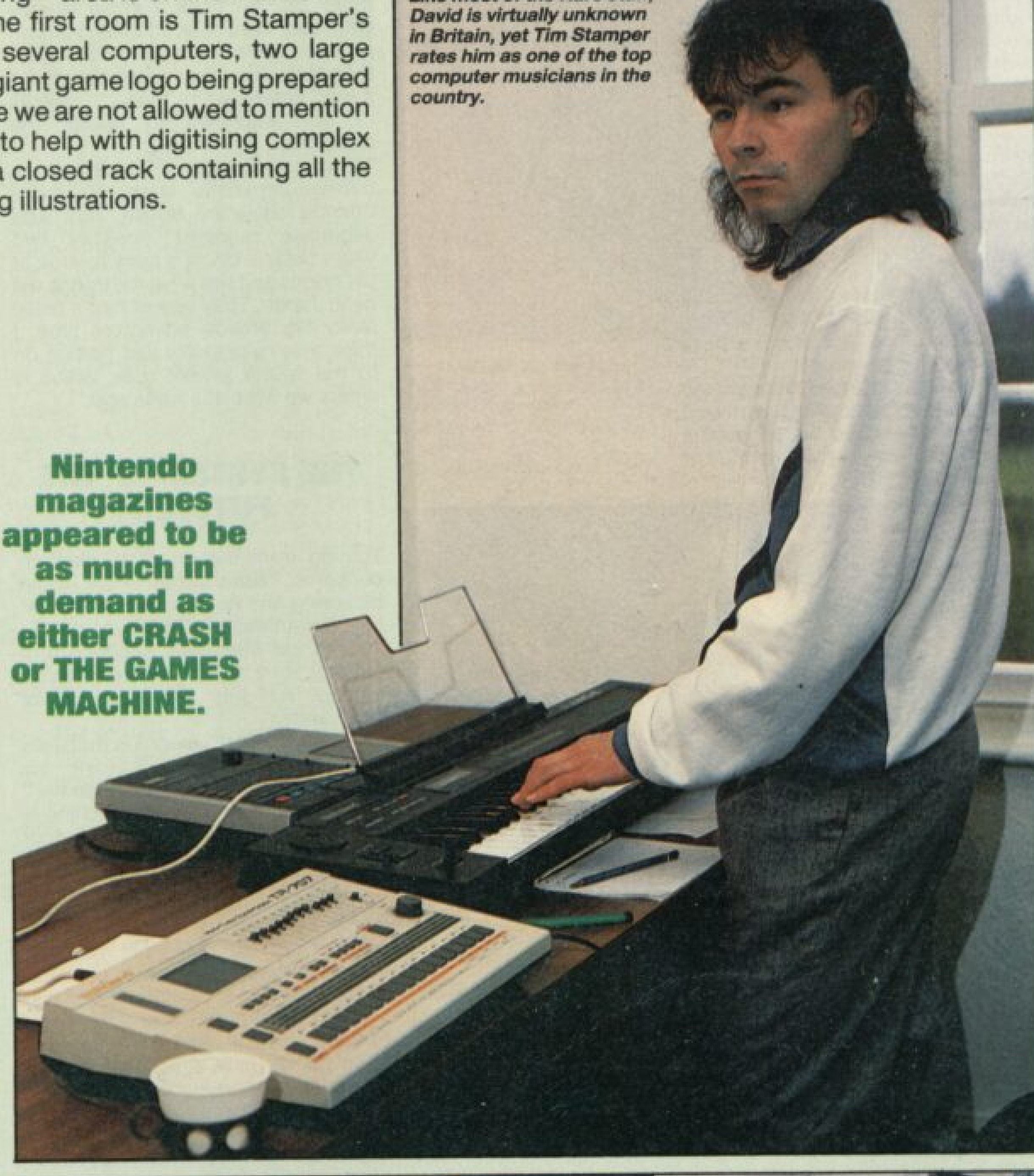
Along a corridor there are several rooms off: a general office, the play room – equipped with much coin-op cabinet paraphernalia – the music room and a string of further software development areas.

The main development room, large and airy, has desks, computers and monitors around the edge where the software engineers all work. Different types of Nintendo machines lie everywhere as well as stacks of cartridges, cards and Nintendo disks. As we arrived, a new package of games had just been delivered from Japan as well as Rare's first PC Engine – the latest machine in the range and all the rage in the homeland. The package was ripped open and its contents eagerly loaded. Rare also receives several of the Japanese Nintendo magazines (see panel), and despite the indecipherable Japanese pictographic script, these appeared to be as much in demand as either CRASH or THE GAMES MACHINE.

Nintendo magazines appeared to be as much in demand as either CRASH or THE GAMES MACHINE.

In talking to several of the engineers, a strange thought occurred. While they are obviously aware of the British software scene around them, it is as though they see it through a dark glass. I was often asked questions about the latest games in the manner of interested people from the Moon – they'd heard about them, possibly even seen and played them, but knew nothing much about how they were doing. Rare is like a time capsule, its people on a nodding acquaintance with their neighbours, but their eyes all fixed on a distant goal no-one around them can see. When I asked Tim if he had any contact with other software houses, he said: 'Yes, a lot of contact with the Japanese.' But what about British software companies? 'Zero,' was the short reply, 'I don't think they even know who we are.'

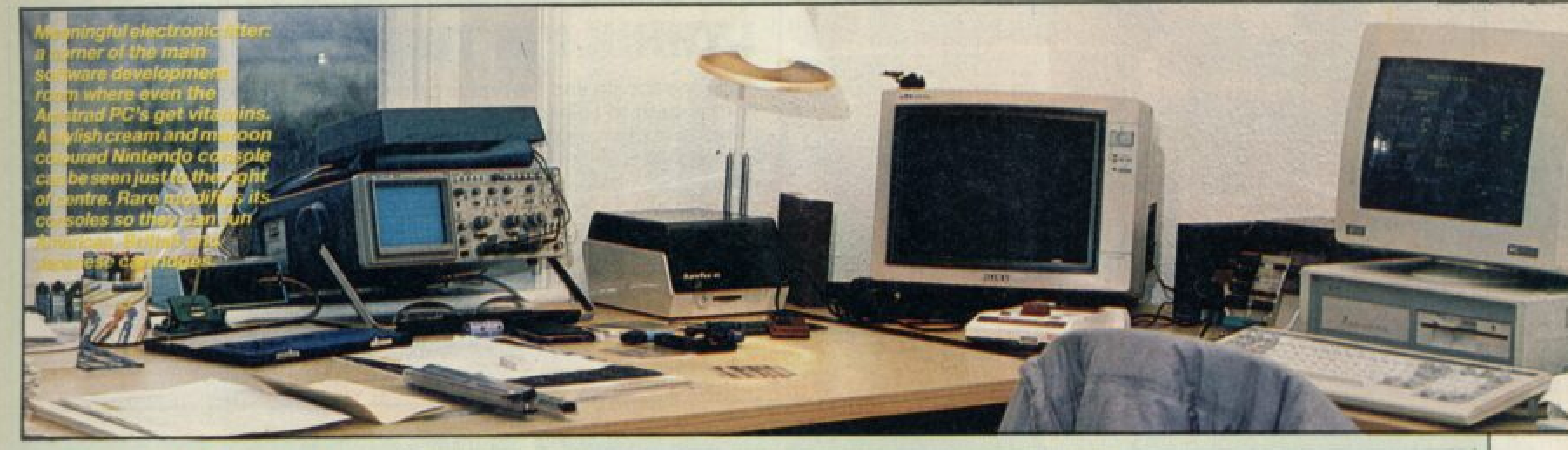
In this sense, there is no doubt that the Stampers are training their people to think Japanese. It doesn't seem to be such a big difference when you look at the games themselves, but it is undoubtedly a very crucial difference, and one on which most of Rare Ltd's resources are being gambled.



Like most of the Rare staff, David is virtually unknown in Britain, yet Tim Stamper rates him as one of the top computer musicians in the country.



Amidst a pile of of incomprehensibly Japanese Nintendo magazines, a lonely CRASH keeps the flag flying for Britain. Behind, Kevin and Mark get their first sight of a new Nintendo shoot-'em-up from a batch freshly arrived from Japan.

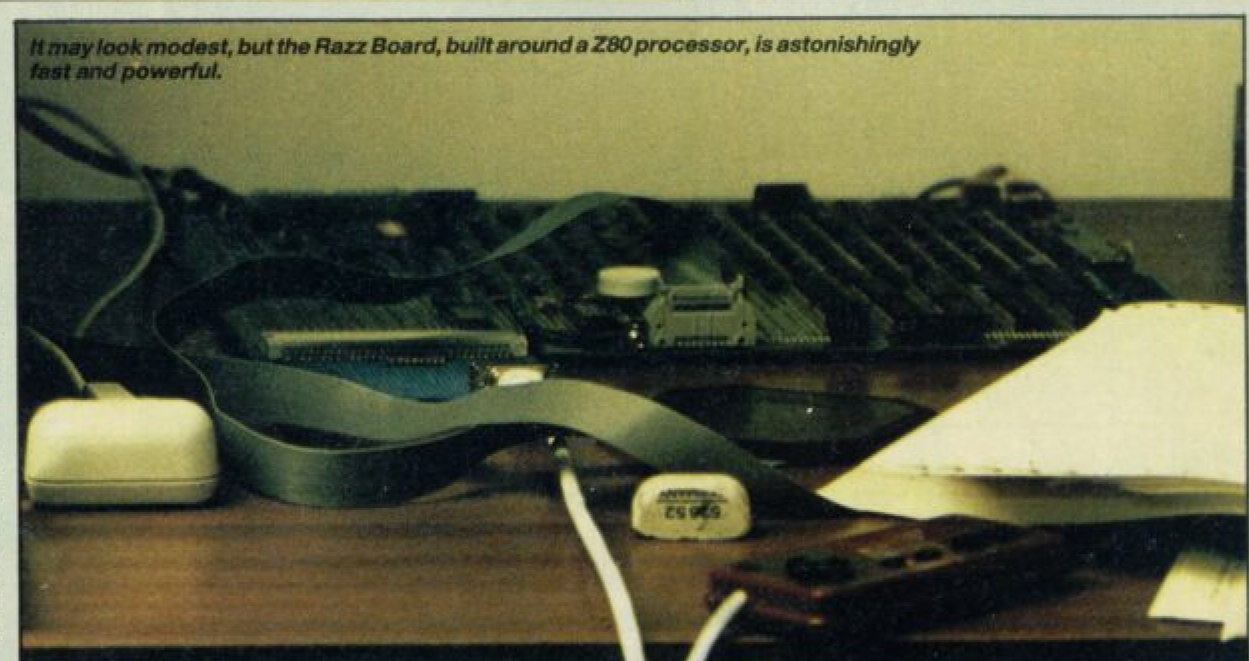


Meaningful electronic litter: a corner of the main software development room where even the Amstrad PC's get vitamins. A stylish cream and maroon coloured Nintendo console can be seen just to the right of centre. Rare modifies its consoles so they can run American, British and Japanese cartridges.

COIN-OPS FOR ALL

The development room is dominated by a veritable tower block of stacked, plastic component boxes, full of chips, capacitors, mini-PCBs and other electronic oddments – a reminder that this company has a vested interest in developing hardware as well as software. In the room next door, we were showed their proud achievement of 18 months of hard work – the new coin-op arcade board, working on this day for our benefit.

Named – they always have a name – the Razz Board, and based around the Z80 processor with a lot of hardware assist, it is extraordinarily fast. They had set up a running demo consisting 33 large, full-colour knights bouncing around the screen so fast you could hardly make out the individual shapes. But these were not moving sprites. Each shape, as it passed behind another, was being cleared and redrawn. We were told the board was moving 1,300,000 bytes around per second.



It may look modest, but the Razz Board, built around a Z80 processor, is astonishingly fast and powerful.

'That is an intelligent drawing up of characters,' Chris said, 'which most machines – like the Amiga – say, 'Oh, they can do a million'. But that's just a dumb fill, and this is actually 64 colours in full separation. I think it will enable us to start competing with the big Japanese and American coin-slot companies now. The first time we've been in this position to go up against them, and I feel we have a piece of hardware that will allow us to do that. I think it's going to knock spots off Mastertronic and the Amiga coin system. I mean, this is redrawing this every 50th of a second.'



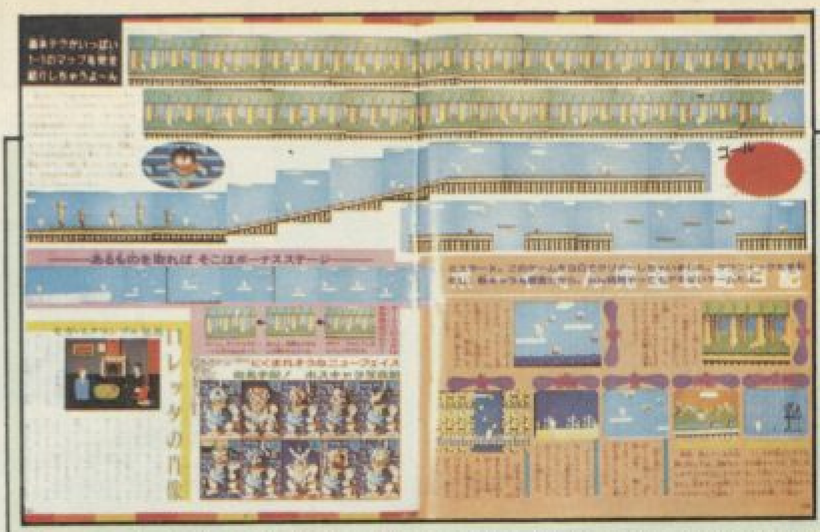
The men who were Ultimate, creators of Jetman, Sabreman and Doohickie, Chris and Tim Stamper, seen here in Tim's graphics office.

The Razz Board is available to anyone who wants to go into writing games for the coin-op industry. Rare provides the board/hardware, graphics and sound utilities. And the sound quality is intended to be very powerful, too. Using Yamaha synth chips, there are 14 available voices altogether, with three of them being top of the range quality. Prototypes should be ready any day now, and as Tim told me, they have had a bit of interest in the board from other British companies. 'Companies that would like a piece of hardware like this but can't devote 18 months to develop it. I mean it's cost a fortune to develop, but as you see it's all fully working.'

'Then there's the graphics editor. It's our own software image editor. It's rather an unusual method which we've patented, and I'm sure an awful lot of arcade companies will want to use it because it's so memory-efficient, and we can move such a large amount of memory around quickly.'

People with a desire and matching ability to design coin-op games should probably be getting in touch with Rare right now.

Too fast for the camera to capture, 1,300,000 bytes go bouncing round the screen every second to create 33 leaping knights.



A couple of typically packed, colourful spreads from just one bi-weekly Japanese Nintendo magazines

I THINK I'M TURNING JAPANESE

If anyone should find the notion of ten million Nintendo machines in Japan's homes hard to swallow, just take a look at the magazines. Rare receives bundles of them regularly from their Japanese contacts. Considering that at one time WH Smith offered advice to Newsfield that CRASH, a monthly, single-user, games-only magazine could not survive, it must seem extraordinary to us that in Japan no less than three magazines are published *twice* a week dealing solely with Nintendo games. Very fat, at usually more than 200 pages, each one costs the equivalent of £4, and circulations are good. They have to be to support the enormous amount of full-colour screen shots and colour throughout. With amazingly busy page layouts just crammed with pictures, the Stamper brothers are convinced that British (and most certainly the much drabber American) magazines should take a leaf out of the Japanese book.



INTENDING NINTENDO

In many respects, in Britain Nintendo is still better known for its coin-op profile. The release of home machines and cartridge games has, to date, been disappointing. But as the Stampers say, Nintendo has been extremely busy in its American market, and they suggest that the Japanese giant is only going to wake up in Europe during the next two years. If anyone has doubts about the corporation's ability to succeed, they should take a look at what has happened in America since the early Eighties.

To put the figures in perspective, the parent Nintendo Company of Japan recorded a net income for the year ending August 1987 of almost $173 million – a 53% increase on their 1986 figure. Net sales were just short of $1 billion. This sharp improvement is largely attributed to the success of Nintendo of America, now based in spanking new headquarters at Redmond, near Seattle, Washington State. It is here, rather than in Japan, that Nintendo's coin-op games are developed for world-wide distribution, although that is by far the smaller of the two games operations.

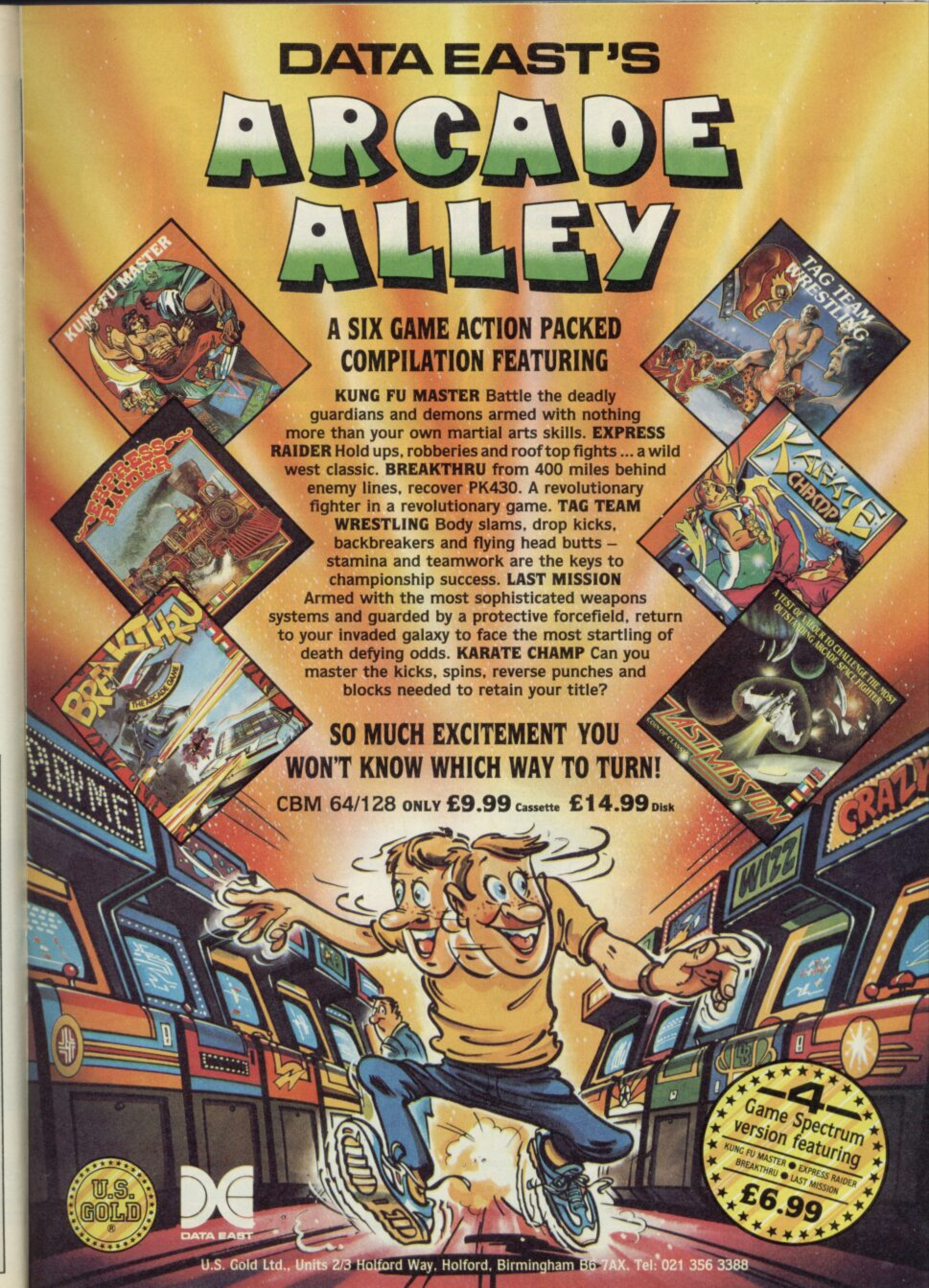
It is with the home market that Nintendo begins to look amazing. It has become the American leader, with over 70 percent of the market in comparison to Atari's 12 percent and Sega's eight percent share. This year, Nintendo expects to sell $600 million worth of consumer products alone. They already have figures to show that their games consoles may be found in one in every three American homes with a boy aged between eight and 14. And new ranges of games this year are being aimed at a much older bracket – up to age 21.

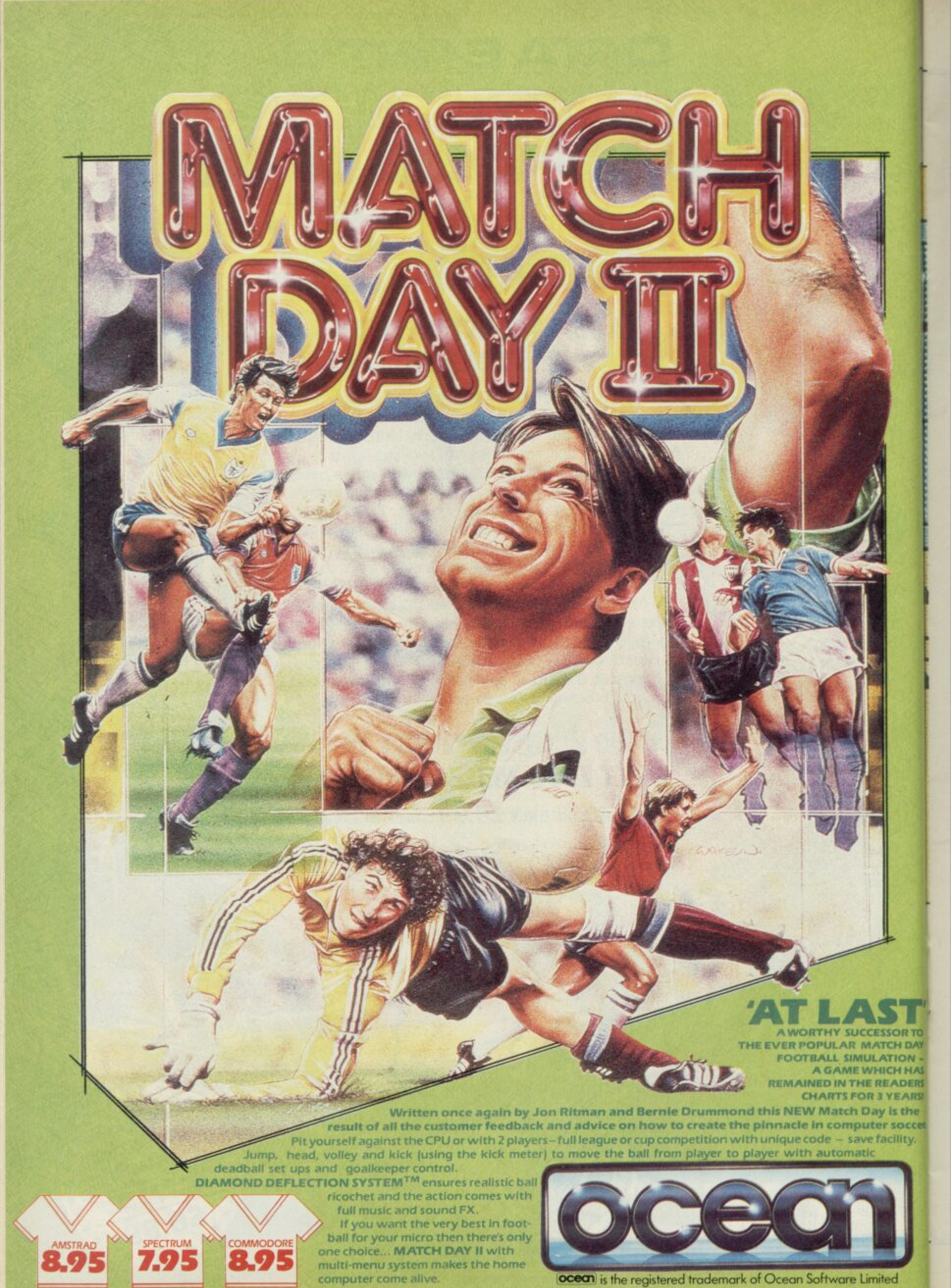
That Nintendo is beginning to move on the British and European markets is evident from its increased coin-op activities. The **Play Choice-10** Video System has been proving very successful in many pub sites around London, and availability will be expanded during 1988. British pubs had lost interest in the video game market because the machines sat around too long, playing the same game until customers became bored. With Play Choice-10, a pub owner buys a cabinet with ten different games on board, and any of these may be changed at will and very easily, providing access to Nintendo's vast range of games. And Nintendo is now licensing games for the system from other coin-op companies such as Konami, and doubtless will be from development firms such as Rare.

It now remains to be seen when Nintendo's major home console move will begin, but when it does, Britain can be assured of far better consoles than we have seen yet, with all the benefits of disk systems and the multitudes of first-rate games to be found in what will be over 25 million Japanese and American homes before this year is out.

For the background information, thanks to *Coin Slot International*.




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REVIEWS

Another month and another selection of games scrutinised by the ever-watchful Mechanics – 29 pages of reviews ranging from Sega's mega-blaster *After Burner* to *Space Quest II*, a humourous animated adventure.

We've also *Power Play*ed some top arcade conversions including *Alien Syndrome*, *Rolling Thunder* and *Side Arms*. Mind you, if simulations are more to your taste, make tracks and head for reviews of *The Train, Apollo 18, Project Stealth Fighter* and version updates of some old favourites – *F-15 Strike Eagle*, *Tomahawk* and *Gunship*.

Original games make a few appearances this issue, including *Black Lamp* a tale from the Dark Ages, *North Star* and *Zillion*.

There are also high-speed games from **Martech** and **Anco**, who burn in with *Nigel Mansell's Grand Prix* and *Karting Grand Prix* respectively. And if you're wondering how much longer there is to wait before we see an Atari ST version of *Out Run*, you're going to have to stay in neutral for a bit longer. Hopefully we should see something of it before the end February. Interestingly enough, *Out Run* sales have topped the 250,000 units mark making it **US Gold**'s biggest selling game ever!

There's also a breakout game (there's one every month, isn't there) in the form of *Traz* from **Cascade**, which adds a few novel twists the popular old format. By the way, next month we'll be looking at *Revenge of Doh*, the sequel to *Arkanoid* from **Ocean**.

There's plenty more in these pages, read on and feast your eyes . . .

LEAD REVIEWS

SPACE QUEST II

The best game this month comes from US software house **Sierra On Line**, distributed over here by **Activision**. *Police Quest II* is highly adventure-oriented, but the action is illustrated by animated graphics. Often humourous, *Space Quest II* is something that the thinking ST owner shouldn't be without.

ADVENTURE PAGES

PROJECT STEALTH FIGHTER

From **Microprose** comes an excellent offering for those into simulations. Combine Space-age technology with futuristic engineering and you have *Stealth Fighter* – a plane virtually invisible to radar.

PAGE 40

POLICE QUEST

Sierra On Line get another game in the top five. *Police Quest* places the player in the role of an American Police Officer out to clear up the windy streets of the US. Check out Rob Steel's assessment . . .

ADVENTURE PAGES

BLACK LAMP

From **Firebird** comes a cartoon romp through the Dark Ages starring Jovial Jack the Jolly Jester in his quest to recover nine magic lamps. This advanced platform-and-ladders game proves to be one of the most amusing games this issue.

PAGE 43

REVIEWS SUMMARY

SNEAKING SUSPICION

PROJECT STEALTH FIGHTER

Microprose

The Lockheed F-19 Stealth Fighter is the American Air Force's latest strike/attack aircraft – although its existence is still denied by the USAF! Using state of the art stealth technology to reduce its radar signature, the aircraft is virtually invisible to radar detection. Even though much of the data on the F-19 is classified, simulation specialists **Microprose** have gained enough public information to produce a 'realistic as possible' computer simulation. **Microprose**'s next project is the computer version of Tom Clancy's novel **Red Storm Rising**.

Four military situations in Europe and the Middle East set the scene for *Project Stealth Fighter*. Missions range from destroying airfields and ground targets to intercepting enemy fighters, early warning aircraft and bombers.

An impressive array of options are presented on loading, and the player is able to specify the level of conflict, mission type, enemy quality, aircraft payload and the realism of the F-19's flight performance. Intelligence reports and mission briefings are called up to provide vital data on the intended target and its defences. Each mission requires different tactics, and a vast array of weapons is provided, including guided bombs, unguided bombs and air-to-ground/air-to-air missiles. Cameras and extra fuel tanks are also fitted for long duration or covert reconnaissance missions.

HI-LO-HI

A typical ground attack mission involves high altitude, fuel conserving flight, followed by a swift dive down under the enemy's radar for the final approach. After taking out the designated target, the plane returns to high altitude and makes for base, hopefully avoiding interceptors *en route*. This type of mission is often called a Hi-Lo-Hi – and it's easy to see why.

If the plane makes it back home, marks are given for the level of mission success and a percentage is awarded based on how well the craft maintained a low profile. The more enemy radar detections made, the lower the percentage gained, and the less chance of being promoted. Sometimes the pilot is forced to bail out – causing an embarrassing international situation if the ejection is made over enemy territory. If the pilot is killed, his service is ended there and then.

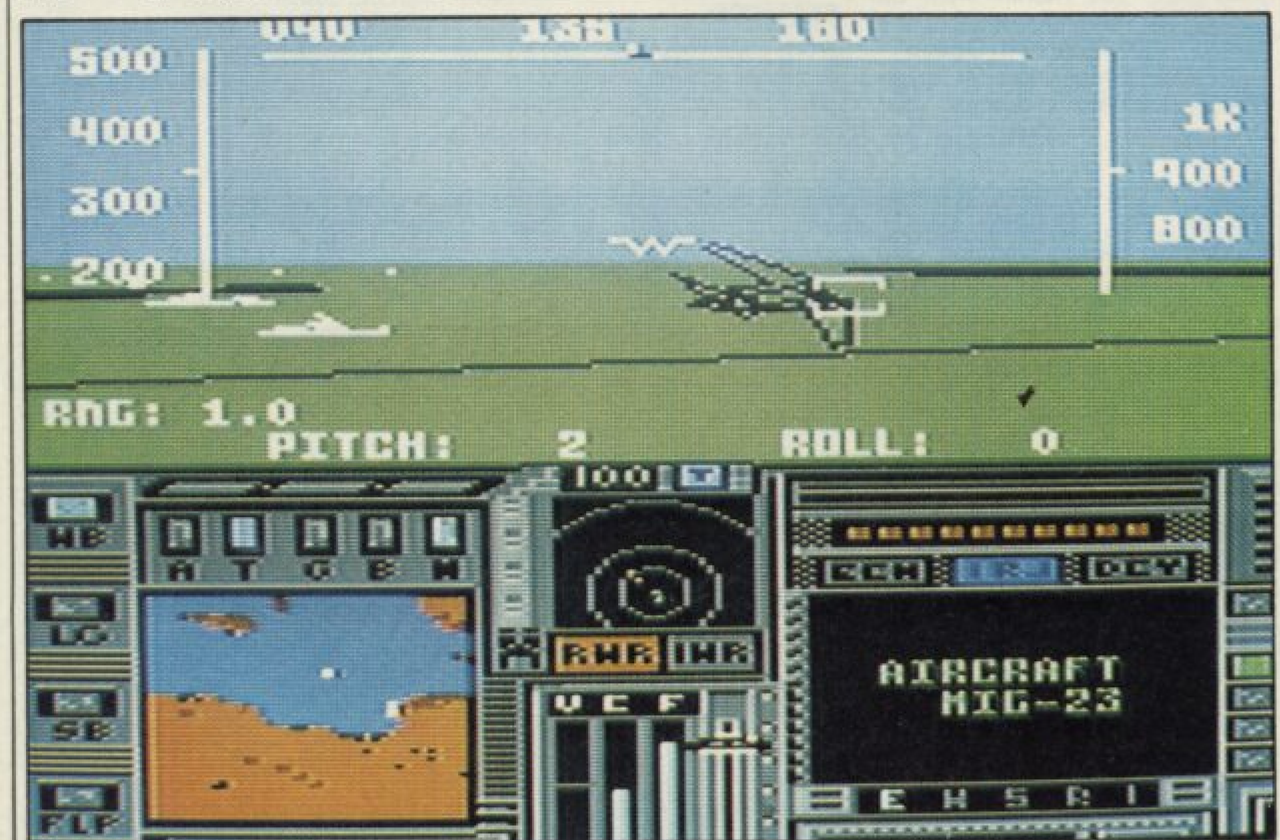
Novice pilots are recommended to start with the Libya mission to help build up experience before tackling the deadlier Gulf and European scenarios. Full save and recall facilities are offered to keep a permanent record of a pilot's status, rank and number of missions attempted.

The F-19's cockpit is a standard modern jet layout with a HUD display, CRT map and status screens, offensive/defensive systems and an EMV bar gauge indicating the aircraft's current stealth rating. A Radar Detection System alerts the presence of incoming missiles and enemy radar scans. Although the cockpit display initially appears confusing, it's a lot tidier than most simulations and looks very authentic.

Microprose have excelled themselves (yet again) with *Stealth Fighter*. It may not be totally realistic, but it generates a superb atmosphere and has incredible playability and depth. Together with the detailed maps and comprehensive manual, *Stealth Fighter* is an outstanding flight/fight simulator which surpasses *Gunship* in every field.

OTHER FORMATS

No release dates yet for any conversions, but expect to see Project Stealth Fighter **for the Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST and PC in the coming months.**



COMMODORE

Cassette: £14.95
Diskette: £19.95

It's truly remarkable how Microprose can fit so much into Stealth Fighter **and still retain gameplay and speed of execution. This is one of the few simulations around which allows the player to fully recreate textbook manoeuvres against enemy aircraft, and the sheer number of different missions to undertake (over 100 in all) guarantees enormous long-term appeal. The variety of weapons on offer provide almost limitless tactics and attack methods, something other simulations tend to leave out. A neat touch is the graphical differences between each aircraft type, and the realism with which they roll, bank and spin through the air. The disk version is almost faultless, but the cassette version features a long and arduous multiload. The wait is worth it, though –** Project Stealth Fighter **is absolutely superb. The wealth of detail, fabulous packaging (which includes maps and two technical manuals) and brilliant gameplay makes this an unmissable combat simulation.**

OVERALL 93%

"Stealth Fighter **is an outstanding flight/fight simulator which surpasses** Gunship **in every field."**

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

APOLLO 18
Accolade/Electronic Arts

The idea of moon landings isn't new to computer games: *Lunar Lander* has been around in various forms for years. Accolade's latest offering, however, takes the player through an entire mission from the launch pad through space to the Moon's surface itself and back again, to splash down in the Pacific.

Apollo 18 is a seven-part journey into space, with each stage recreating a key point in the lunar landing mission. The proceedings are split between a telemetry screen, where the flight control computer programs are run and all system operations initiated, and the action screen where all manoeuvres are executed (both manual and automatic).

Starting on the launch pad, the player's first task is to get the Saturn V rocket operational. Once the propulsion and guidance systems are activated, the craft is steered manually in order to keep the vehicle on the correct trajectory to achieve optimum height for the space journey.

During this stage, Mission Control displays the Saturn's course plus any deviation, whilst a camera at full zoom (complete with realistic wobble) tracks its flight path. Failure to achieve the correct height sees the mission prematurely aborted.

Once out of Earth orbit, the Command Module/Lunar Module docking sequence is tackled, following system activation on the Telemetry screen. Docking is a very basic affair, simply involving lining up the Module docking port and maintaining minimum velocity during the approach.

A change of course is necessitated at the halfway mark. This normally complex operation has been greatly simplified, with the player merely needing to press and release the fire button at the right time to execute a course correction.

On reaching Moon orbit, the lunar descent is started. Reminiscent of earlier games, the player strives to keep the lander within the descent corridor in order to achieve a soft touchdown. Land too hard and the craft is destroyed; land off course and the mission is aborted. Three attempts are made before an abort is forced.

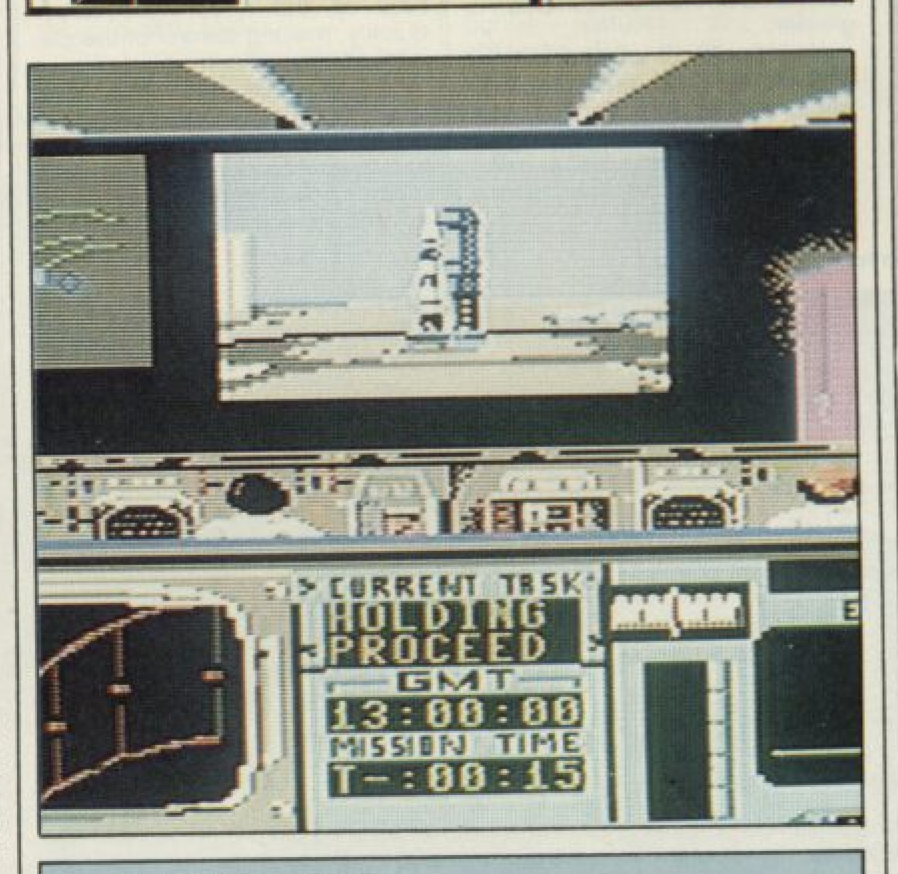
MOONWALK

Once on the Moon, the player has to Moonwalk to a distant surveyor craft and back again before running out of oxygen, keeping on course all the time whilst maintaining a steady rhythm of movement. Not exactly the most difficult of stages, but graphically it's the most pleasing.

Arriving safely back in the Lunar Module, signals the start of the return journey, again making course corrections en route. Before the capsule can re-enter Earth's atmosphere, however, an astronaut is required to leave the space craft and recover three erratic satellites before they move out of range. Due to the inertia and zero gravity, some tricky movements are needed to line up and successfully capture the man-made devices.

Re-entering the Earth's atmosphere is a hazardous process, requiring the player to keep two lines dead centre to remain on course. The re-entry capsule heats up if it deviates off course and eventually disintegrates above 5000°.

Successfully re-entering the atmosphere is greeted with a splashdown scene, welcome home messages and a percentage based on how well each stage went.



COMMODORE 64/128
Cassette: £9.95
Diskette: £14.95

Although Apollo 18 **is as accurate as can be expected with its highly technical-looking telemetry screens, occasionally impressive graphics and faithful re-creation of mission stages, there isn't an awful lot of content to each section. Much of the time, the player is limited to entering sets of numbers to simulate the execution of flight control computer programs. The action sequences that do occur are limited in depth, ranging from the somewhat average lunar descent and subsequent Moonwalk, to the graphically poor and undemanding Module docking. It's the gameplay of these sections and the amount of player interaction in each which could do with a little extra. This aside,** Apollo 18 **is enjoyable, playable and has a great atmosphere (no pun intended). The presentation and realistic effects, coupled with good use of sound means that you're really up there on a lunar mission. A nice touch is the static filled, crackling speech which accompanies each stage, adding to the overall effect. Like** Test Drive, **disk and tape access is continuous, reducing the game's appeal for disk-less 64 owners. If you're after a realistic game based on actual lunar Landings and you don't mind the relatively simple gameplay and the constant disk/tape access then** Apollo 18 **is the one for you.**

OVERALL 73%

" . . . Apollo 18 **is enjoyable, playable and has a great atmosphere . . . "**

OTHER FORMATS

There are no immediate plans for converting Apollo 18 **in the forseeable future, although a Spectrum/Amstrad conversion would stand up quite well since the layout and overall presentation of the game is pretty straightforward.** Apollo 18 **on the Amiga or Atari ST format would really give the 16-bit machines a chance to show off their superior sound and graphics (possibly including crisper sampled speech and digitised pictures of actual Apollo missions).**



THE ETERNAL RUNNER-UP

NIGEL MANSELL'S GRAND PRIX

Martech

Nigel Mansell has not only endorsed **Martech**'s latest release, but he also acted as technical consultant along with engineer **Peter Windsor**, and **Williams Grand Prix Engineering Ltd**, constructors of the subject of the game – the Williams Formula One motor car. The program was written by **DJL Software**, which consists of **Dave** and **John Looker**.

The game's objective is to win the World Grand Prix by successfully competing in races across 16 different tracks, from Brazil to Australia.

Although *Nigel Mansell's Grand Prix* attempts to simulate 'the real thing', it provides an option allowing the player to choose between 5, 10 or 15 laps in a race, whereas a normal Grand Prix race can last over 60 laps.

Before the race begins there's a practice session consisting of three laps, followed by a warm-up lap. The practice laps are important as they determine the starting position of the player's car in the race.

The screen is split horizontally between the action on the track and the comprehensive instrument panel displayed on the lower half of the screen. This 'dashboard' has all the indicators relevant to racing, one of the most important being the rev counter, which displays the speed of the engine, up to 12,000 revs per minute. The needle on the revs counter should ideally be within the Power Band (between 9,000 and 12,000 rpm). If the needle goes much lower, speed is lost; if it becomes too high, speed is increased but fuel consumption is greater.

Also displayed are the fuel, oil temperature and pressure, and water temperature gauges. The gear shift denotes the current gear and wing mirrors give a near-accurate view of the action behind the car.

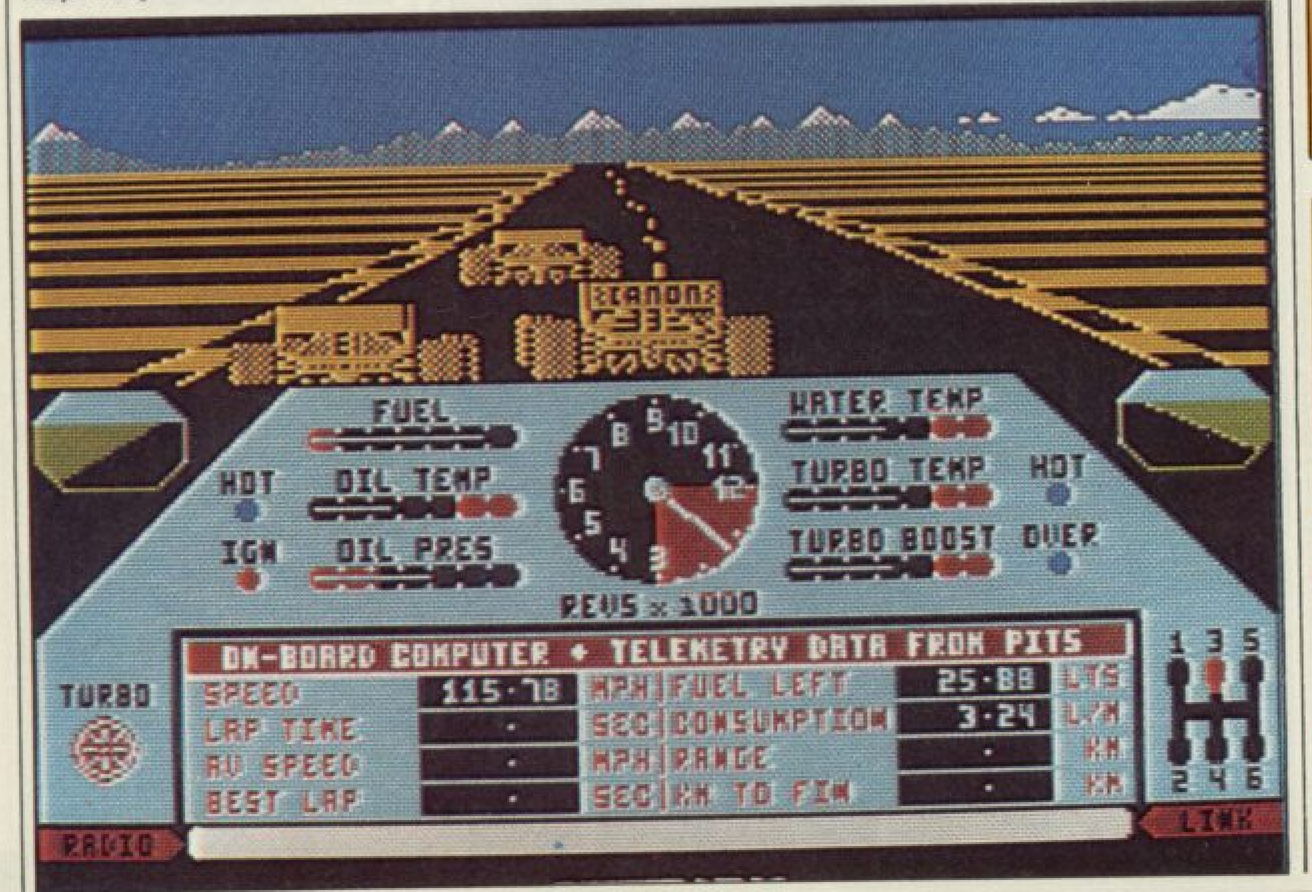
THE PITS

The Williams is fitted with a Turbo boost which provides the engine with extra power – in this case up to four times the normal pressure on the air/fuel mixture. Probably the most useful element of the panel is the On-board Computer, represented as a window in the lower half of the panel. This displays speed, lap time, fuel consumption, distance to the finishing line and so on. Messages from the pits are also displayed via the radio link at the bottom of the screen.

A pit-stop can be made at any time during a race by driving off the main track and onto the access road, providing an automatic change of tyres. It's essential to have at least one pit-stop during a race as the tyres wear down quickly, making control of the car increasingly difficult.

Racing itself has been well implemented, and the feeling of control is quite effective: the player has to constantly monitor speed, revs and the running of the engine, as well as compete against the opposing cars, which aren't ridiculously hard to beat as with many racing games. However, the fact that a practice session of three laps *must* be endured before competing makes the whole process somewhat laborious. Unfortunately the illusion of high speed doesn't really come off adding little excitement to the gameplay.

I hope the tyres hold out as Nigel goes for a close second



SPECTRUM 48/128

Cassette: £9.99

Nigel Mansell's Grand Prix **includes both 128k and 48k versions on the same tape, allowing all the courses to be loaded in one go with the former, while the latter is a multiload. Apart from this, there's little apparent difference between the two in gameplay. Although the action part of the screen is displayed in monochrome, it causes few problems – the track and cars are all clearly visible. Sound on both versions is little more than the wailing of the engine as the speed shifts. Falling somewhere between a fast driving game and a simulator,** Nigel Mansell's Grand Prix **is quite competent, although it lacks initial playability and hard-core addiction – it could have been much better.**

OVERALL 73%

OTHER FORMATS

Both the Commodore 64/128 and the Amstrad versions should be out on the streets by the time you read this. Although gameplay remains the same, the graphics will obviously be more colourful. The Amstrad version may be slightly slower.

"Racing itself has been well implemented, and the feeling of control is quite effective . . . "

LIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

BLACK LAMP
Firebird

Two of the programmers behind *Star Trek* – **Steve Cain** and **Graham 'Kenny' Everett** – have combined forces once more, to produce Firebird's latest 16-bit release.

The graphically excellent *Black Lamp* is a Mediaeval melodrama relating the adventures of Jolly Jack the Jovial Jester and his quest to rid the kingdom of evil.

To return the Kingdom of Allegoria to its former glory, Jack has to collect nine magic lamps and return them to any of the 20 chests scattered around the kingdom. Lamps are collected by simply walking over them, and once one has been collected it must be placed in a chest before another can be picked up.

The most powerful of all is the Black Lamp of the title, which is now guarded by a Dragon – the most ferocious of all the enemies Jack is likely to meet. In the final confrontation, it takes several well-placed shots from Jack's magic belt to dispose of the foe.

The Kingdom of Allegoria is divided into many different regions, with four main types of scenery – castle rooms, the castle battlements, the village and inside the houses. All the scenes are littered with period objects and the backdrops are all well drawn, adding considerable atmosphere to the proceedings. Rooms are depicted as static screens while the village and the battlement scenery scrolls horizontally as Jack romps around.

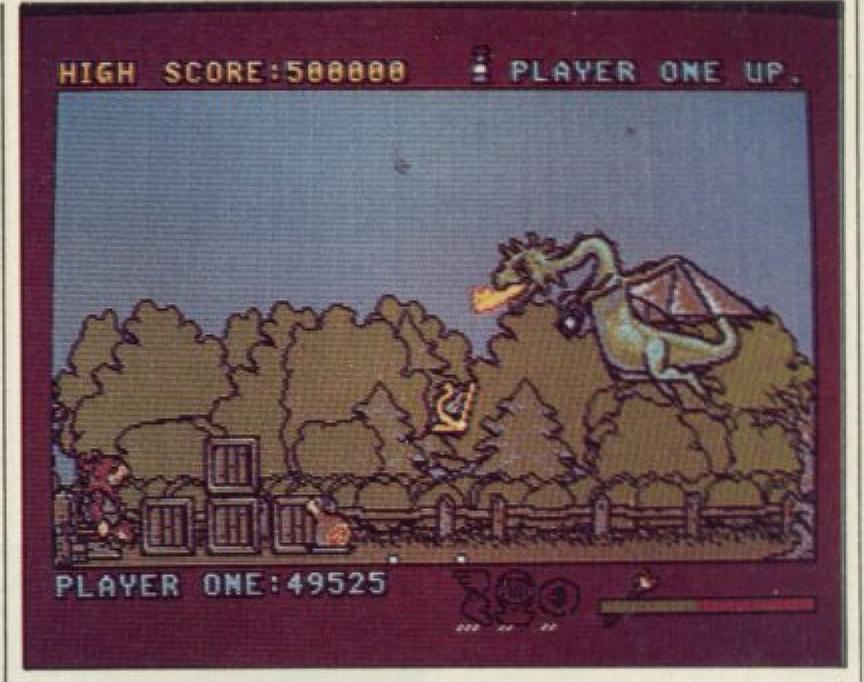
PLAGUE

Jack's control method appears rather complicated to begin with since his steps are rather large, and positioning him to walk through exits proves a bit fiddly. This is soon overcome, however, and doesn't pose any long-term problem.

Vertical movement is mainly achieved by Jack leaping from objects and platforms, which are in abundance, although there are ladders to climb and the occasional staircase to make things slightly easier.

The kingdom is plagued with beasts of all natures, including swarms of kamikazi dragonfly, werewolves, goblins, slime Witches, trolls and devilish imps – each with their own evil powers and weaponry. Contact with these depletes Jack's energy bar, and total removal of energy signals the loss of one of Jack's five lives. Energy is partially replenished, however, by collecting food found around the kingdom.

In addition, there are three bonus features to collect: obtaining five jewels provides Jack with limited magical armour, five musical instruments gives him bounce power to stop him losing energy on falling too far, and five weapons are collected to gain temporary magical firepower.



Jack the Jester comes across an old flame

There's no time to admire the beautifully animated creatures inhabiting the screens of **Black Lamp**, *just blast them before they blast you*



ATARI ST
Diskette: £19.99

The detail, amount and quality of the animation and graphics make Black Lamp **something special to look at. The theory behind the gameplay is quite simple and it boils down to being little more than an addictive romp through platforms-and-ladders land. Sound is used to good effect – you can switch between FX mode and music (a boppy remix of Greensleeves).** Black Lamp **presents a formidable challenge in terms of completing it – but there's plenty of fun to be had in the process.**

OVERALL 86%

OTHER FORMATS
Expected to be released across all formats.

" . . . the detail, amount and quality of animation make Black Lamp **something really special to look at . . . "**

UP THE POLE

NORTH STAR

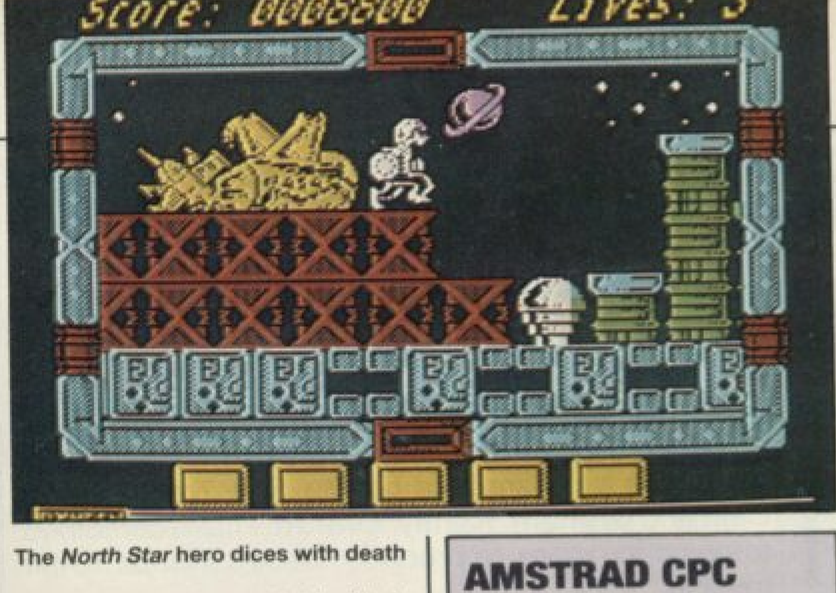
Gremlin Graphics

An alien horde is running riot over a heavily-inhabited space station, built to ease the pressure of over-population on Earth. The task of destroying the intergalactic interlopers and re-activating the life-support systems falls on the player's broad shoulders. Written initially for the Spectrum and Amstrad by **Gremlin** newcomer **Jon O'Brien**, conversions to the Commodore 64/128 and Atari ST are likely to follow very soon.

North Star is little more than a simple but enjoyable horizontally scrolling platform shoot 'em up reminiscent of *Gun Runner* – a title Hewson released last year. It scores well on the graphical front with both the Amstrad and Spectrum versions being colourful and extremely attractive.

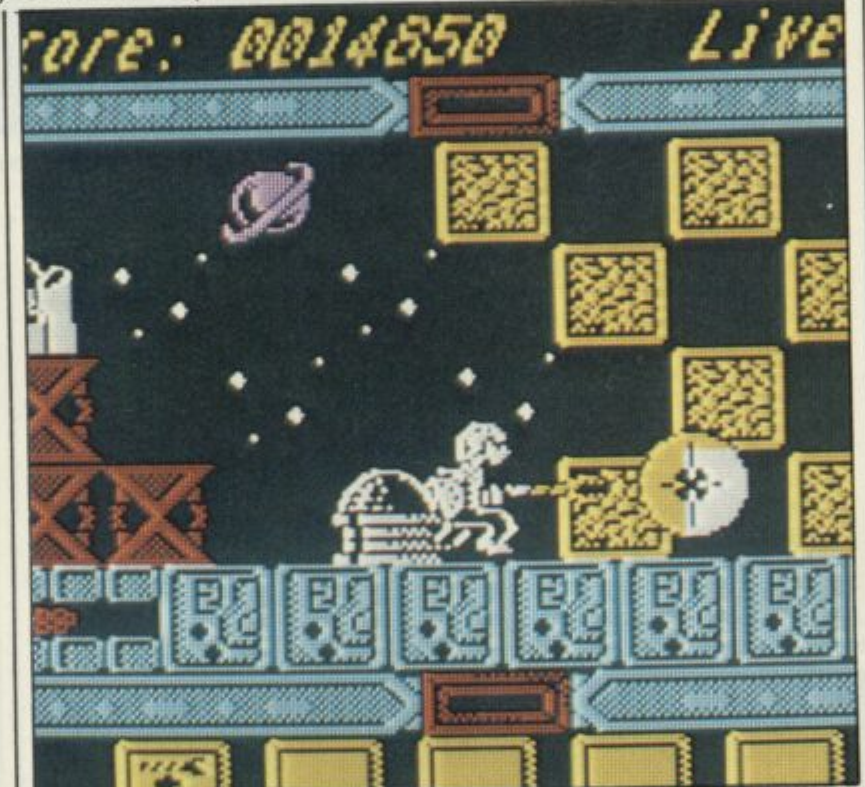
As our hero rambles through the space station – comprising several separate levels – additional equipment is collected from bonus pods scattered around the corridors. Extra features include The ability to shoot upwards, anti-skid boots and temporary invincibility, plus a Smart bomb for the mass elimination of alien species.

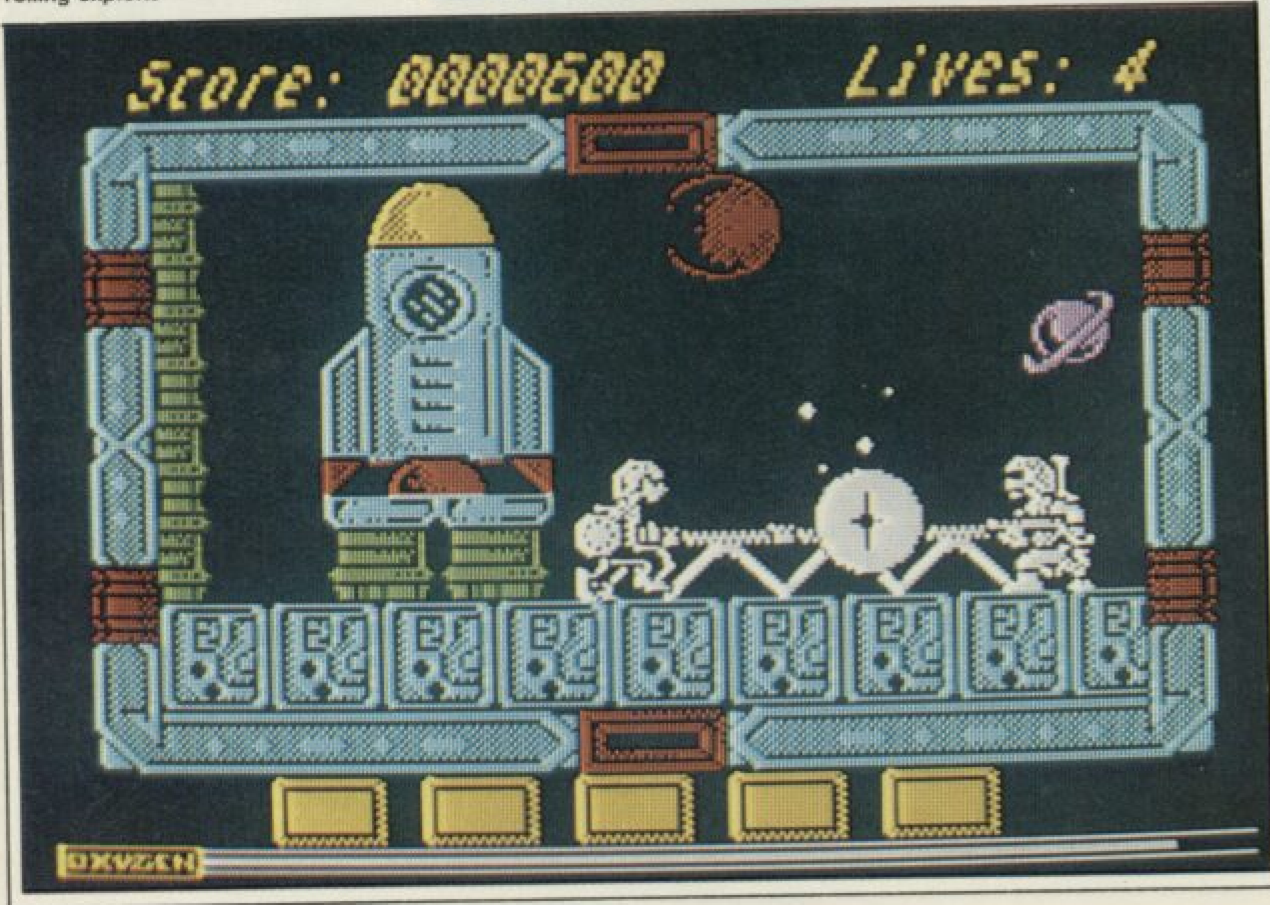
An oxygen meter slowly ticks away at the bottom of the screen, signalling the inevitable approach of death. This is replenished by further collection of bonus pods, which also give extra score.



The *North Star* hero dices with death

Like other games of this kind, the gameplay can prove annoying until the layout of the landscape and the location of the bonus pods have been learned. Once that knowledge is secured, however, *North Star* provides worthwhile entertainment for quite some time.





Our daring alien blaster leaves his space ship at the start of his thunder rolling exploits

AMSTRAD CPC

Cassette: £9.99
Diskette: £14.99

Definitely the most colourful of the versions, with distinctly 'Gremlinesque' chunky graphics. The gameplay is surprisingly fast, considering the Amstrad's scrolling capabilities, which have been overcome by considerably reducing the size of the action screen. Although there's nothing really new happening, North Star's attraction – apart from the fact that it's a rather nifty piece of Amstrad programming – is that it's smart, fun and relatively addictive.

OVERALL 73%

SPECTRUM 48/128

Cassette: £7.99
Diskette: £14.99

The Spectrum North Star is surprisingly slower than the Amstrad version, but certainly offers a clearer view of the action, making gameplay somewhat easier. Colour has been used extremely well, and although there's the occasional clash, this doesn't detract too heavily from its appeal. Music is short, but good, and the effects help considerably. Again, the fact remains that North Star doesn't have an awful lot on offer for the thinking games player, but is excellent fun for the occasional mindless blast.

OVERALL 80%

" . . . North Star is little more than a simple but enjoyable horizontally scrolling platform shoot 'em up . . . "

RETURN OF THE GENRE

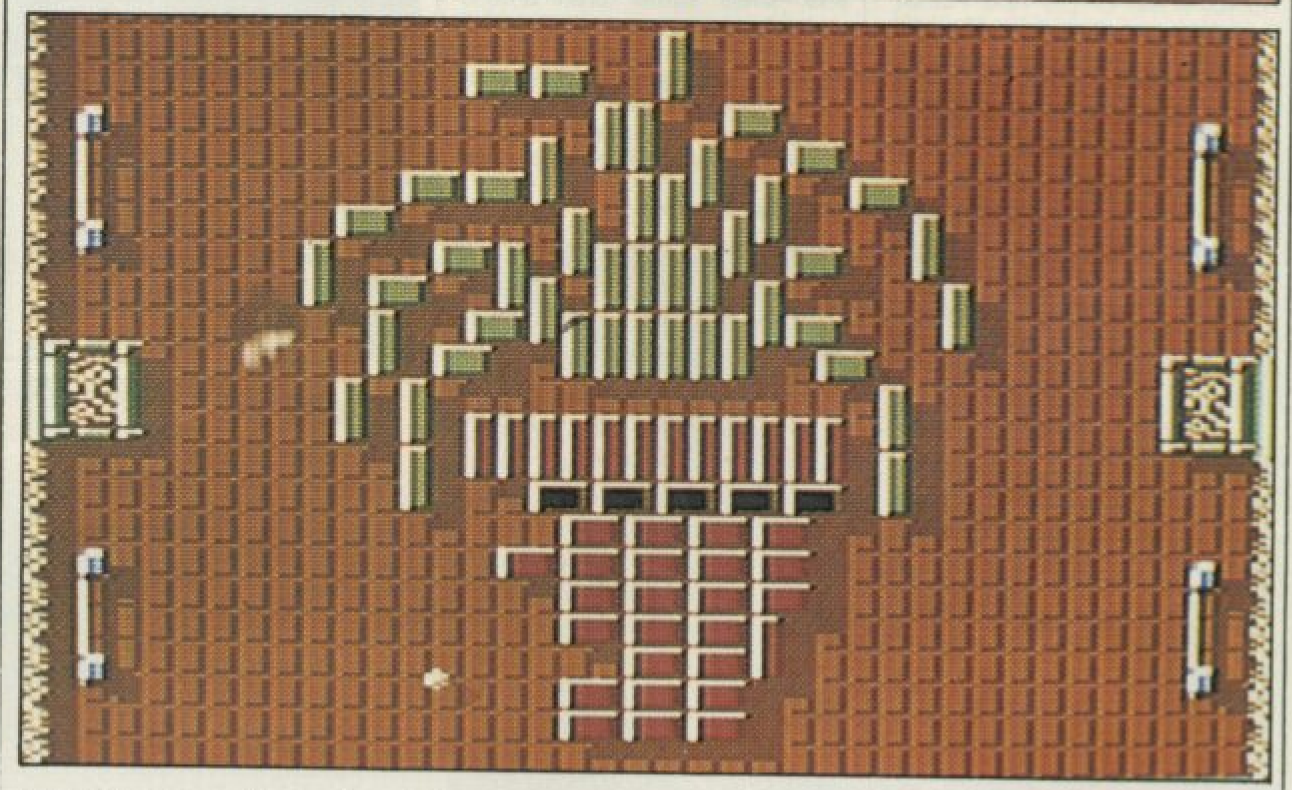
TRAZ
Cascade

Breakout's back with a vengeance, under the pseudonym of *Traz* (short for Alkatraz – the famous prison in which the ball becomes trapped). The author is **Jonathan Menzie** – currently working as part of the team on **Cascade**'s delayed *19* game – and musical accompaniment is provided by **The Judges**, a team of Danish programmers.

COMMODORE 64/128
Cassette: £9.95
Diskette: £14.95

Traz is 'enjoyably' frustrating, but difficult to play for long periods of time before a nagging tedium sets in. It *does* offer several innovations over past Breakout clones, however, and concentration is tested far more than in previous versions, especially on screens where one player is in control of both horizontal and vertical bats. The majority of the screens are well designed, balancing difficulty with aesthetic considerations, and the random element means that every game is subtly different. Traz is a smart and addictive offering and is certainly one of the better games to come from Cascade.

OVERALL 80%



Traz contains 64 screens, all of which can be easily altered using the in-built screen designer. In the grand fashion of *Breakout*, each screen has to be cleared of all removable bricks before the next is entered, by rebounding a ball around the confines of the screen. However, there's no set order in which the screens appear, adding some random variety to *Traz* each time it's played.

Further innovations include the addition of a second bat, which moves horizontally or vertically, allowing two players to play simultaneously, or giving the solo player a hard time.

Bricks come in many forms: there are vertical bricks, horizontal bricks, unsmashable bricks and refractors (which subtly deflect the path of the ball). Monster generators are also included, creating aliens which interfere with the state of play.

GAMMA-RAY TRAPS

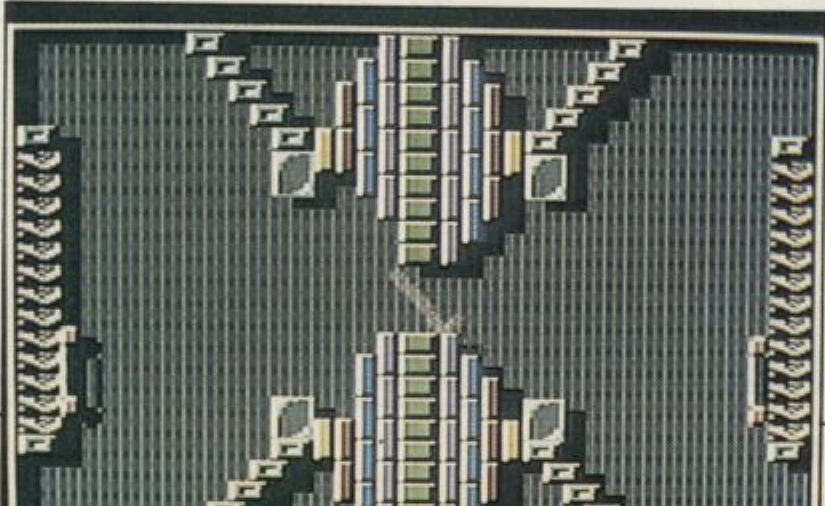
Many bricks contain power pills which appear as spinning question marks. Contact with the bat results in some physical effect such as lasers, increased speed, multiple balls and so on. It's impossible to tell what effect the pill will have, which proves slightly frustrating as more often than not the effect achieved is detrimental to gameplay.

Balls are lost when they hit the 'gamma-ray' traps – these appear as distinct areas around the edge of the screen rather than just at the bottom, as with most games of this ilk.

Another unusual twist is the fact that the screens all form part of a maze: as one screen is cleared, arrows materialise to indicate the possible pathways. If the player is not on the outer perimeter when the 64th screen is completed, the ball remains trapped forever!

The addition of a construction set makes *Traz* a much more worthy purchase. It's simple to use, allowing access to any of the features, such as bricks (of all natures), screen colours, traps and monster generators. Prospective designers can include up to four bats on screen at any one time and alter the map of the maze to suit, making *Traz* as difficult, or easy as required.

Ready to breakout and make an impact on the ballbreaker market with *Traz*



OTHER FORMATS

Coming soon are conversions onto the Spectrum and PC machines. Although nothing has been seen of them yet, there's no reason why they shouldn't be just as good, and hopefully Cascade will make use of the PC's colour board.

"The addition of a construction set makes Traz a much more worthwhile purchase . . . "



SFAX AND THE SINGLE GIRL

MACH 3
Loriciels

Ooh la Loriciels! Even the biggest French software houses have trouble raising a bark from the British bulldog – when was the last time you saw someone with an Ere Informatique carrier bag? – but Paris-based Loriciels has 14 titles lined up for UK release in 1988. THE GAMES MACHINE got wise to the adventure *Sapiens* in Issue Two, and finds a touch of traditional shooting-'em-up in *Mach 3*.

Evil sorcerers just won't leave well alone – in *Mach 3* the wicked Sfax, necromancer of the Red Planet, has cast a spell on your beautiful companion Gwendoline. And the fearless player must destroy the despicable tyrant to save Gwendoline from a slow and painful death.

But the wily Sfax will place many obstacles in your path as you fly your small fighter craft across varied landscapes.

As the game starts you're zooming across a barren desert, dodging the land mines that occasionally explode if you're foolish enough to fly anywhere near ground level. And when enemy fighters – alone or in groups – swarm down from the sky, some nifty flying and laser-gun shooting is needed to survive. (The craft's laser gun can run out of energy, but restores itself slowly – just be restrained.)

At intervals, gates appear, usually in groups of five, and you have to fly through these 'space-time gates' (watch the mines!) to replenish power and reach the next section of *Mach 3*. But eventually you approach a tunnel entrance surrounded by land mines. Some smart flying (and crossed fingers) is needed to dodge these and enter the tunnel.

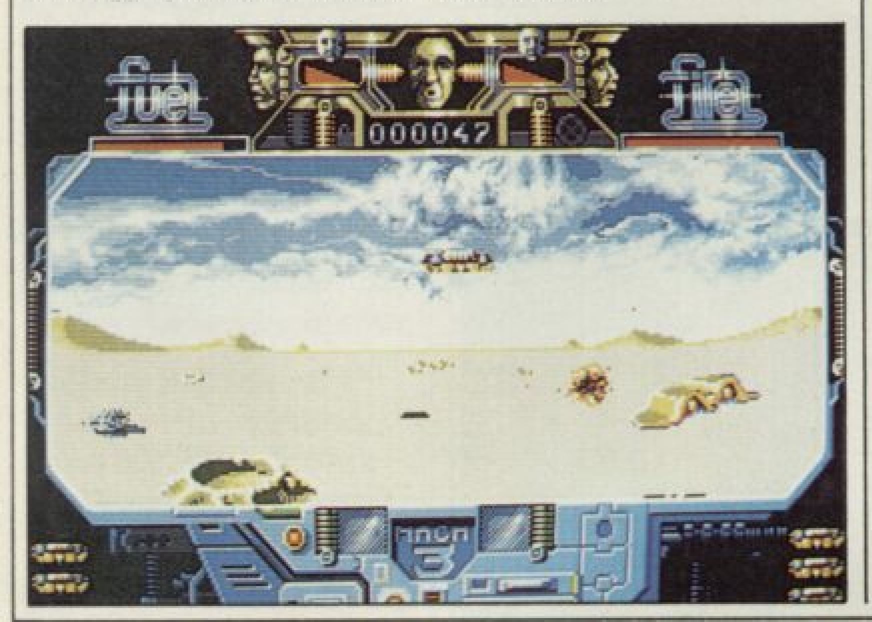
At the top of the playing screen, flanked by fuel and fire-power meters, is a face – the looming countenance of Sfax. The closer the player gets to his lair, the unhappier the face becomes.

And as the player gets closer to Sfax, the action becomes fast and furious, with more and more aliens, meteorites, and even Sfax's fizzog (shot for a 3000-point bonus) making their appearances. But to save Gwendoline you'll have to hurry – her time is running out . . .

The very attractive, if slightly risque Atari ST loading screen



Still struggling through the first level – Atari ST screen



The incredible speed of the PC version makes it very difficult to negotiate the arches.



ATARI ST
Diskette: £19.99

The graphics and sound are great: solid colourful sprites whiz around very pretty backgrounds in a realistic manner, and there's a reasonable title tune as well as decent speech. As for gameplay, Mach 3 **is great fun and very addictive from the start – though it might wear thin after the mad sorcerer's been defeated a few times. This is a fast shoot-'em-up in the best tradition.**

OVERALL 79%

PC
Diskette: £24.99

Though not as colourful or graphically detailed as the Atari ST version, the PC Mach 3 **is just as playable. The tune and surprisingly clear speech are good, too, adding to one of the better PC games around.**

OVERALL 69%

OTHER FORMATS

Amiga, Amstrad CPC and Commodore 64/128 versions are planned – nothing's too much for Gwendoline.

" . . . a fast shoot 'em up in the best tradition . . . "

ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE KNIGHTS

KNIGHT GAMES II
English Software

Following the success of *Knight Games* for **English Software**, author **Jon Williams** has now taken his mediaeval combatants into the future for the sequel, *Knight Games II*. The package comes with three individually-loaded games on two cassettes, offering around 190K of coding.

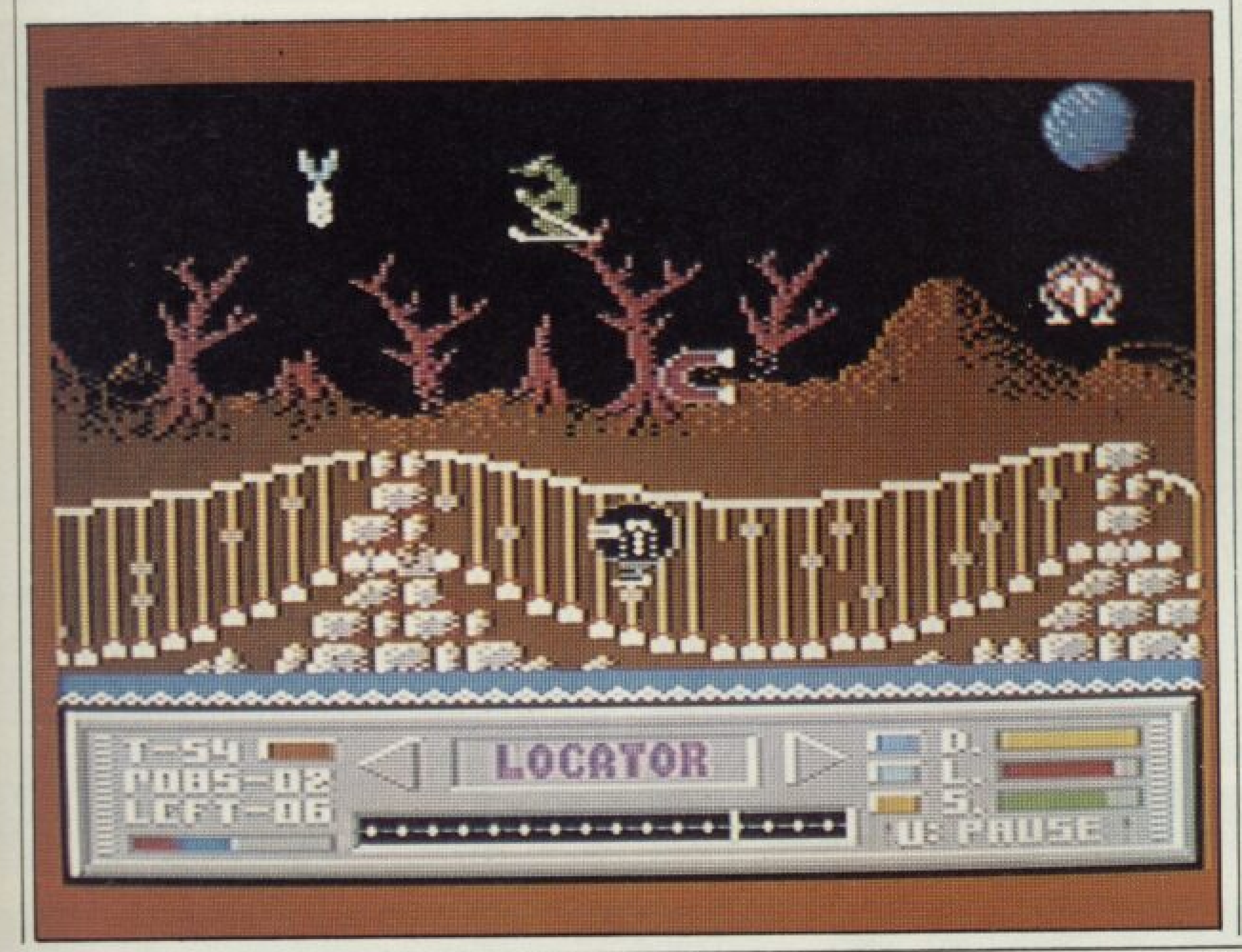
The year is 3002 AD, but even in this day and age the order of chivalry is not dead: robots have merely replaced the armour-clad knights, and light sabres the sword.

The game is split into three sections: Combat Robot, In Orbit, and The Final Tournament. The sections are played in order and access to the later sections is allowed only once the preceeding ones have been completed; thereafter, a security password is used to begin the games at will.

Combat Robot casts the player in the role of Robby the Robot (although not he of Forbidden Planet fame), and it is his duty to travel across three desolate landscapes in an attempt to rescue the stranded Robo-Knights, Head-Bangers and Big-Mouth aliens, ten of whom are found in each landscape.

A direction indicator is used to track down the nearest unfortunate castaway, and the ensuing action takes on a *Dropzone*-style gameplay, with hordes of aliens attacking throughout.

Robby the Robot collects the stranded aliens and Robo-Knights to take them back to his launchpad



SPACE INVADERS

As suggested, the second section takes the player into outer space. Piloting a remote craft, his task is to decimate the attacking spaceships, whilst protecting vital supplies that are being delivered to his station. Supplementary to lasers in this game are a limited supply of smart bombs, use of which destroys all enemy ships.

As with the first episode, this section is split into three sub-levels, two in space and the third in the loading bay of the space station. Here the player wards off the aliens, in true *Space Invaders* fashion, as the supplies are being off-loaded into the bay. Shoot the meanies, but watch the provisions: damaging these costs energy.

Having reached the final destination, the tournament proper is entered, where the player competes in hand-to-hand combat over three events: Jet Jousting, Light Sabres, and Photon Chains. The player can challenge either the computer or a second person to do battle, and the basic idea is to defeat the opponent while attempting to avoid the same, and incur as high a score as possible in the process.

The Robo-Knight is protected by shields which are damaged by heavy contact with his opponent's weaponry. When his shields are completely drained, for him, the tournament is over.

COMMODORE 64/128
Cassette: £9.95
Diskette: £14.95

After wooing many fans with the first Knight Games **program, Jon Williams just may lose them again with the sequel. The first striking feature are the simplistic, almost child-like graphics and awful 'cute' sprites, which seem terribly out of place. In fact the graphics can only be said to be doing their job in the final load, where they suddenly become very good indeed. The gameplay is very derivative of earlier games, offering nothing new, and what is there is quite shallow, having little depth or complexity. With a little more polish in the right places,** Knight Games II **could have been a very worthy purchase; unfortunately its current standing is with the 'average' crowd.**

OVERALL 48%

"In 3002 chivalry is not dead: robots have merely replaced the armour clad knights, and light sabres the sword . . . "

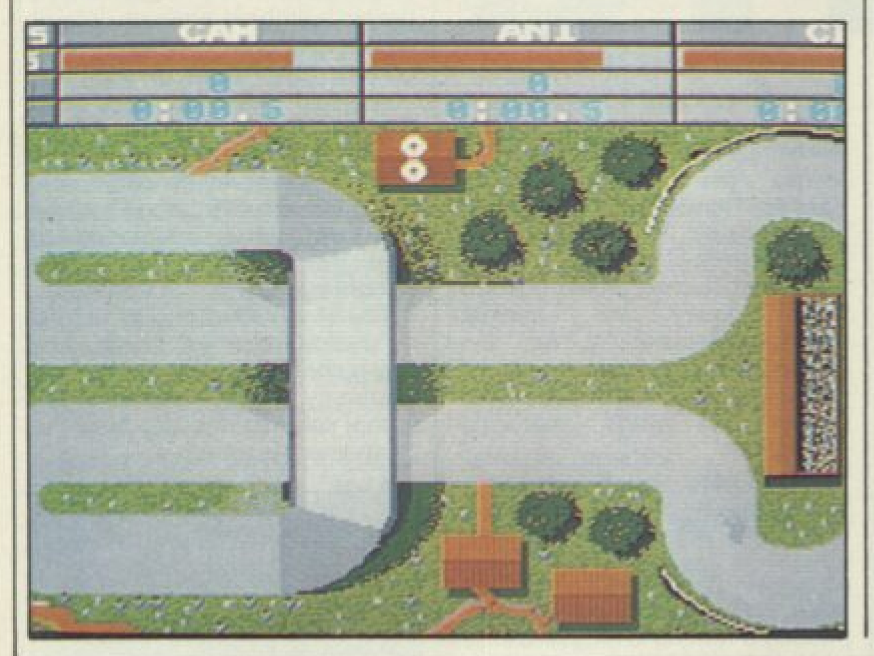
PRESS ANY KEY

AWESOME KART?

KARTING GRAND PRIX

Anco

Karting Grand Prix has the dubious honour of being the first Anco game for the Amiga to be reviewed in these hallowed pages. Previously known as Anirog, the company was one of the first to produce games for the Amiga, and continues to provide budget releases for a mere £9.95.



There have been plenty of racing games in the past few years, most of which have been concerned with the powerful Formula One cars. Anco's version features smaller, but equally nippy Go-Karts.

The first screen encountered is used to select the desired track, chosen from the eight available, the number of players, skill level, whether to practice or compete in a race, and the player's initials. Other options include weather conditions, plus sprocket level and type of tyre, which are adjusted according to the climate: dry, wet and icy.

Located at the top of the playing area is a readout, which displays the amount of laps to be raced, the number of laps completed and a timer. At the end of the race, a chart appears to inform the player of the score, the best lap time, points bonus and total score. There's also a highscore feature that automatically records the player's name and highscore for posterity, and depending on which skill level they chose in the first instance, it is placed in either the Novice, Amateur, or Professional tables.

Racing around a tarmac track in Anco's Supersprint *clone*

AMIGA
Diskette: £9.95

Karting Grand Prix **borrows heavily from other overhead racing games, most notably,** Super Sprint. **Control of the kart is simple but fiddly, requiring diagonals to be found in order to accelerate and turn at the same time. During initial attempts, more time is spent crashing into the scenery than racing around the track. The graphics are clear but lack polish, and the high point of the game is the sound, being suitably noisy sampled engine roars and crashing effects as the kart leaves the course. A basic and very standard racing game, which is only exciting in the two-player mode.**

OVERALL 40%

" . . . the high point of the game is the sound . . . "

THE QUEST FOR FIREPOWER

TRAUMA
Infogrammes

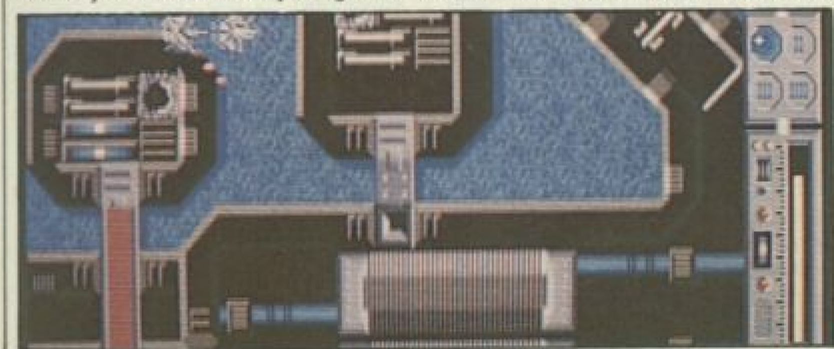
Infogrames join the ever-growing list of companies endeavouring to make their mark in the 16-bit vertically scrolling shoot 'em up market. *Trauma* was actually written by the French company **Ere Informatique**, whose list of successful UK releases to date is quite impressive, and who are set to release (through Infogrammes UK) some quite stunning software – see the preview section for further details.

The solar system is in jeopardy once again: a race of space barbarians is bent on it's destruction, and the task of saving the day falls to the solo player.

The mission's aim is one simply of destruction: fly over enemy territory and blast everything that moves. The ship's energy is depleted when struck by enemy fire or contact is made with alien ships and surface structures. Specific spinning craft enhance the power of your ship when hit, and this enhancement takes the form of increasingly powerful weapons and larger ships.

Teleporting devices dotted around safely transport your ship a predetermined distance across the current level. Emerging from the transporter can sometimes prove dangerous, however, if the exit is positioned in the midst of enemy flak.

There are four levels to battle through, and at the end of each, a hyper-ship is dealt with by destroying the energy generating globe it carries. The whole game consists of 150 screens which scroll down at a deceptively serene pace, considering the amount of high speed destruction that is required to survive. *Trauma* is available for the Atari ST only and at present there are no plans to convert it to any other format



> **" . . . the whole game consists of 150 screens which scroll down at a deceptively serene pace . . . "**

ATARI ST
Diskette: £19.95

The enemy ships and surface defences are very attractively presented and animated, and backgrounds are colourful and scroll very smoothly. The sound could be have been much throatier – it adds little to the frantic action taking place on screen. *Trauma* is very well presented and should keep newcomers to the shoot 'em up scene happy for a while. However, a certain member of THE GAMES MACHINE review team managed to complete the game in less than twenty five minutes. It should be a lot tougher; even our in-house adventurous personage managed to get eighty percent of the way into the game! The fact that Trauma **is far too easy to complete is shown in the overall percentage awarded – a shame when it looks so good.**

OVERALL 58%

PRESS ANY KEY

IT'S GETTING THERE

THE TRAIN
Accolade/Electronic Arts

Train simulations might seem as safe and predictable as the 20.30 to Reading – after all, there's none of the thrills, spills and steering of cars and planes as you chug along a preordained rail route. But **Accolade** and **Electronic Arts** are giving the genre a fighting chance and an unusual France-based historical background with *The Train* (misleading slogan: 'Only you can stop it'). Its atmosphere is about as far from *Evening Star* and *Southern Belle*, Hewson's nostalgic simulations, as you can get on a cheap ticket. Has the risk paid off? Well, *The Train*'s arcade action may not be the greatest thing since steam – but at least it's getting there.



It's 1944. The Second World War has begun its final act. Nazi-occupied France is awaiting Allied liberation. The Germans, sensing defeat, are retreating and taking the spoils of war with them. One such prize is a train full of France's artworks, bound for Berlin.

Desperate to prevent the disappearance of these treasures, the French Resistance movement sends engineer Pierre LeFeu (the player) and Le Duc, a train fireman, to hijack the train and take it back through German lines to the advancing Allies at Riviere. The whole mission must be completed before dawn – trains are sitting ducks in daylight.

To hijack the train from the Metz yards, Pierre must provide machine-gun cover for Le Duc while he runs over to change the track switches. (When the German guards fire back, duck if the bullets get too close – a single hit ends the game immediately.)

Once out of the train yards, Pierre and Le Duc control the locomotive's progress from a cockpit-style screen. The engine's furnace must be kept stoked up with coal, steam pressure in the boiler kept at a safe level, and maximum speed maintained to beat the dawn deadline.

Using the train's whistle to signal, you can get your Resistance brothers-in-arms to redirect the train on to any line. To help plan a route, a map details all the stations, bridges, tracks and junctions in the system.

FIGHTERS AND GUNBOATS

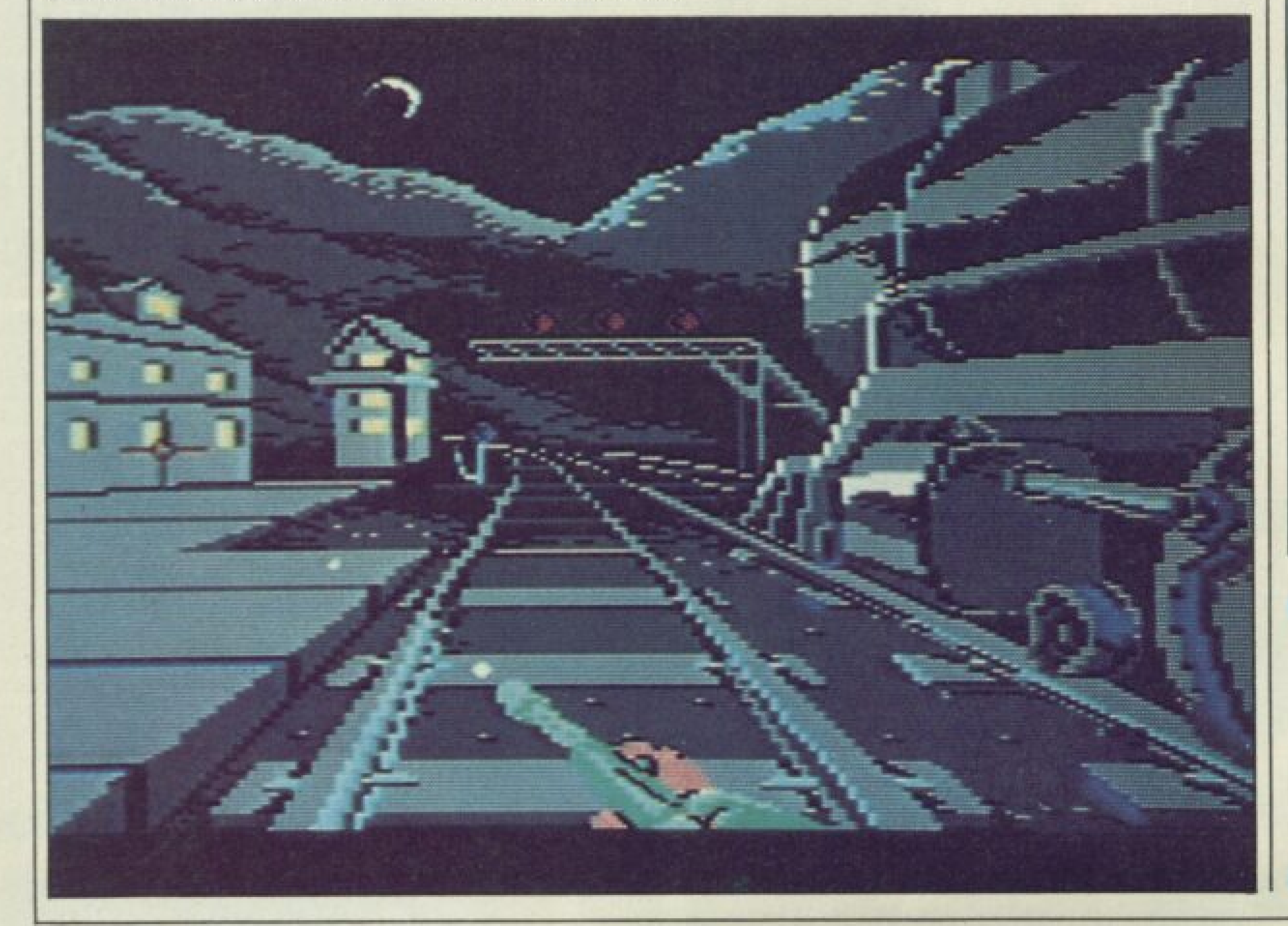
Enemy fighters diving in to strafe the train can inflict heavy damage unless quickly shot down by the train's anti-aircraft guns. And other enemy vehicles include German gunboats guarding the bridges along the railway route. You must stop at every bridge and use the 155mm cannon on these gunboats before crossing, or be blown off the tracks.

Stations along the line provide extra coal and water and a handy telegraph system for communicating with the Resistance. But Germans guard these vital points, and for Le Duc to get to the telegraphy unit Pierre has to again provide machine-gun cover.

Inside a station, orders can be given to capture bridges, capture stations or repair the train. But the Resistance can only hold captured targets for a couple of hours and can't always respond to requests, so don't rely on them too much.

If the train makes it to Riviere, the mission is assessed: your final rating depends on the damage sustained by the priceless cargo of art and the number of enemy targets destroyed during the journey.

The Train *looks fine, but soon descends to commuter dullness*



COMMODORE 64/128
Cassette: £9.95
Diskette: £14.95

There are some good ideas in The Train**: the combination of simulator-style train control and arcade sequences works well. The train-control screen is reminiscent of Hewson's** Evening Star, **though nowhere near as complex and a lot easier to operate, and the whistle-blowing and steady rhythm of riding along are remarkably effective. The graphics create a Second World War atmosphere well, and there's a great sense of realism throughout the game. But the problem with** The Train **is the simplistic arcade sequences – though graphically pleasing, they don't offer much challenge, and the game is rather easy to complete. There's some incentive to try different routes and to beat journey times, but interest will wane fast.**

OVERALL 71%

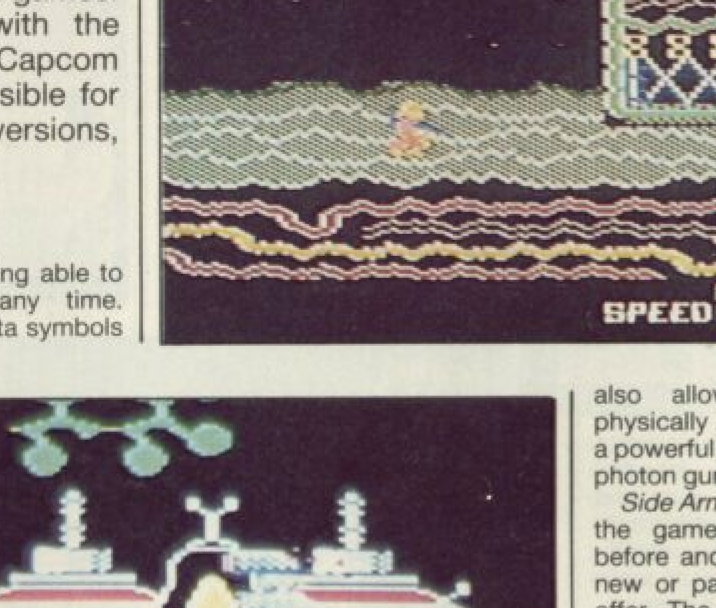
" . . . the simplistic arcade sequences are graphically pleasing but don't offer much challenge . . . "

BROTHERS IN ARMS

SIDE ARMS

GO!

US Gold's sister company **GO!** recently tied up a deal with coin-op manufacturer Capcom to release computer conversions of ten of their original games. *Side Arms* marks the first of these, with the Commodore 64/128 version written in the US by Capcom themselves, while **Probe Software** are responsible for taking care of both the Amstrad and Spectrum versions, both of which are expected to appear very soon.



The plan of megalomaniacal alien Bozon to conquer Earth provides the latest excuse for embarking upon a mission of wanton destruction and mayhem.

Side Arms's shoot 'em up action takes place across 16 horizontally scrolling backdrops, and although three levels of difficulty are available at the beginning, the alien attack waves always appear in set patterns, providing few surprises once familiarity has been made.

Side Arms follows the recent trend of progressive shoot 'em ups, featuring the collection of additional weaponry along the way. Equipment on offer includes speed up/down, three-way shot, tail gun, a mega bazooka launcher and an automatic laser cannon. A complete arsenal therefore proves quite irresistible.

Combat may be faced solo or as a two player team effort; the second participant being able to enter the fray at any time. Collection of Alpha/Beta symbols also allows two players to physically join forces and employ a powerful, multi-directional Beta-photon gun.

Side Arms isn't very impressive: the gameplay has been seen before and there's nothing really new or particulary innovative on offer. The game itself is really a year too late to make any significant impact on the market, but no doubt the name will live on.

COMMODORE 64/128

Cassette: £9.99
Diskette: £12.99

The Commodore incarnation is a very uninspired offering – the graphics aren't particularly colourful or dynamic, and the sound doesn't amount to much. There's not an awful lot to comment on, simply because it's all so average and has been seen many times before. Many features of the original are missing and it doesn't really provide the same exhilaration or excitement of the arcade version. If you enjoy horizontally scrolling shoot 'em ups, try the far superior Delta.

OVERALL 59%

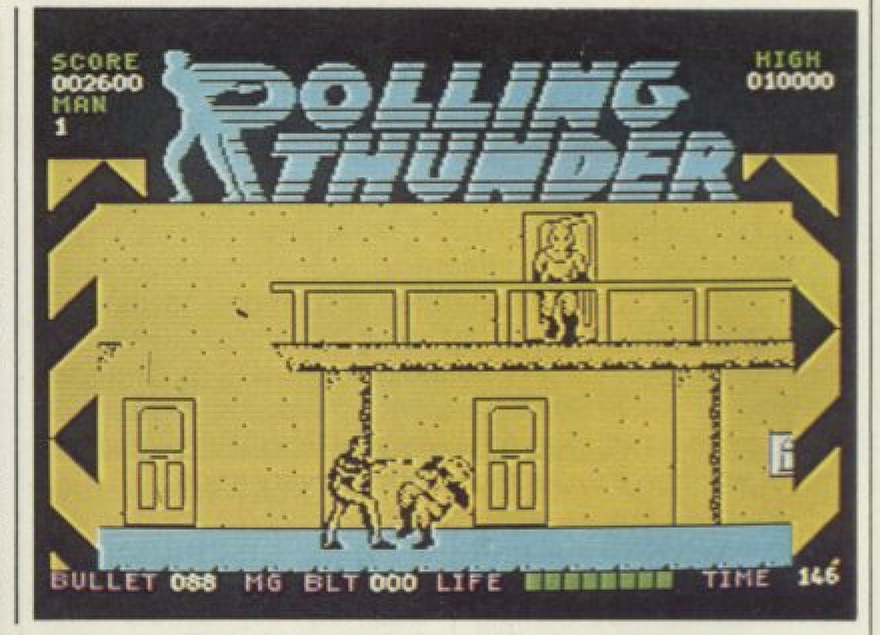
"Many features of the original are missing and it doesn't really provide the same exhilaration or excitement of the arcade version."

ALBATROSS FLAVOUR

ROLLING THUNDER

US Gold

Converted by **Tiertec**, who also worked on US Gold's *720°*, *Rolling Thunder* has been licensed from the Namco coin-op and is one of the more expensive licenses bought recently. The conversions are both pleasing, and make up for the disappointment provided by *Out Run* over the Christmas period.

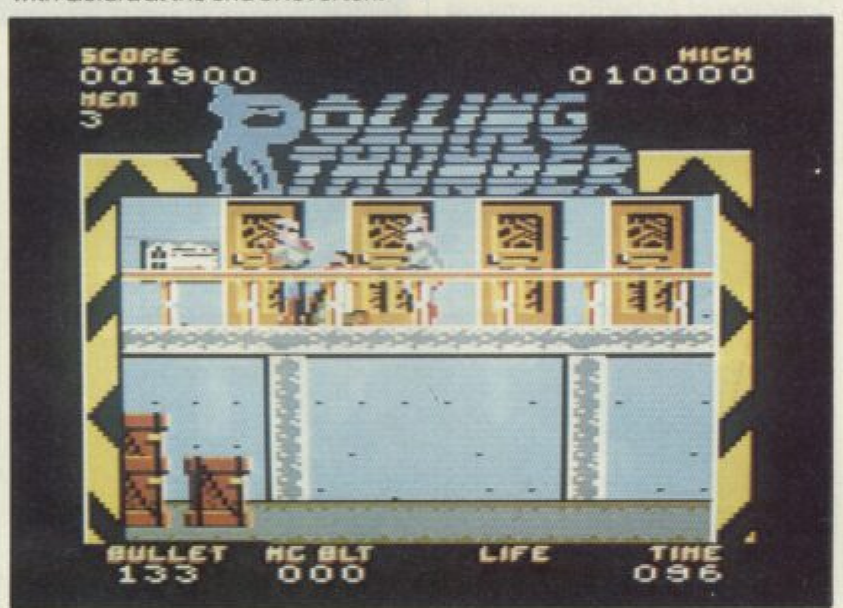


Playing a hero codenamed 'Albatross' doesn't really bode well for a mission to overthrow a secret organisation controlled by the sinister Geldra.

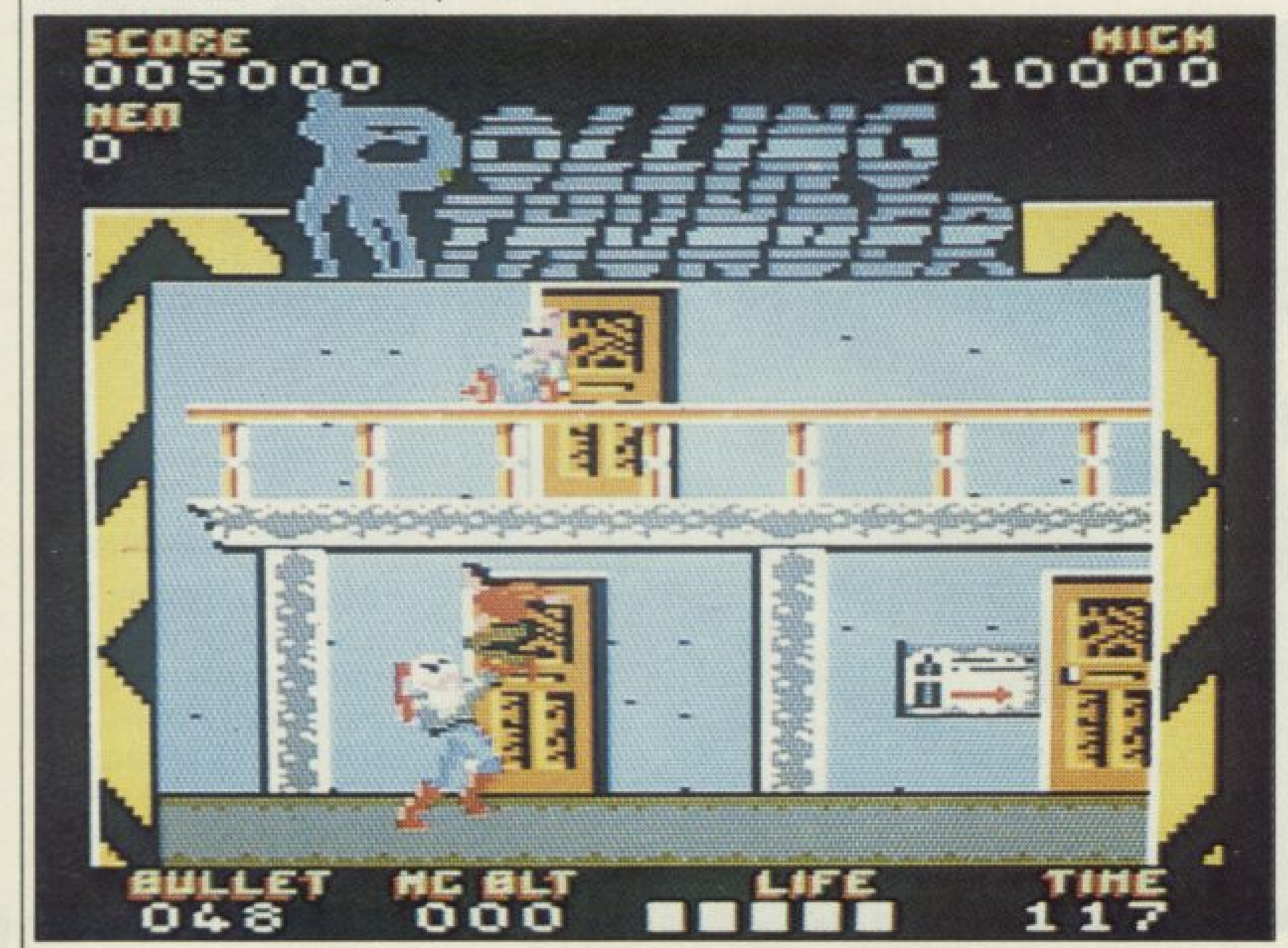
The action takes place across ten levels of horizontally, and occasionally vertically scrolling backdrops set in Geldra's underworld base. The agent's route is littered with obstacles such as crates, rocks, and piles of tyres, and Geldra's hooded henchmen armed with guns and bombs are continually on his trail. This opposition is swiftly eliminated by a couple of well-aimed shots from Albatross' revolver or machine gun, until his ammunition runs out – thereafter he has to defend himself in unarmed combat.

Additional ammunition is collected from behind specific doors, indicated by a bullet or machine gun arrow on the wall. These alcoves also provide a temporary respite from the ensuing carnage.

Surprisingly, the beginning of level one appears the hardest, in which the Albatross is faced by a sudden attack from a four or five man gang with only the pistol for defence. By later levels, the defence systems have engaged automatic lasers, and the action finally climaxes in the encounter with Geldra at the end of level ten.



The Amstrad version is slightly slower to play than the Spectrum, yet harder to master



SPECTRUM 48/128

Cassette: £8.99

Rolling Thunder **provides a highly addictive romp through violence, and is a well designed conversion considering the Spectrum's limitations. Playability is high and, like many games of this sort, knowing the layout of the levels help to endear its gameplay. The well-animated graphics are mainly monochromatic, but there's a fair bit of colour splashed about elsewhere. Scrolling is slightly jerky, but** Rolling Thunder **is good fun, not too taxing on the brain cells, and quite deserving of the sum asked.**

OVERALL 80%

AMSTRAD CPC

Cassette: £9.99
Diskette: £14.99

Only slightly less appealing than the Spectrum version, the Amstrad Rolling Thunder **is closer to the arcade in level of difficulty, compensating for its slower overall speed. The graphics are extremely colourful, almost to the point of being garish, but both scrolling and animation could be better. Entertaining and challenging.**

OVERALL 78%

"Rolling Thunder **is one of the more expensive licenses bought recently . . .**"

A WARP ON THE WILD SIDE

SKYFOX II
Electronic Arts

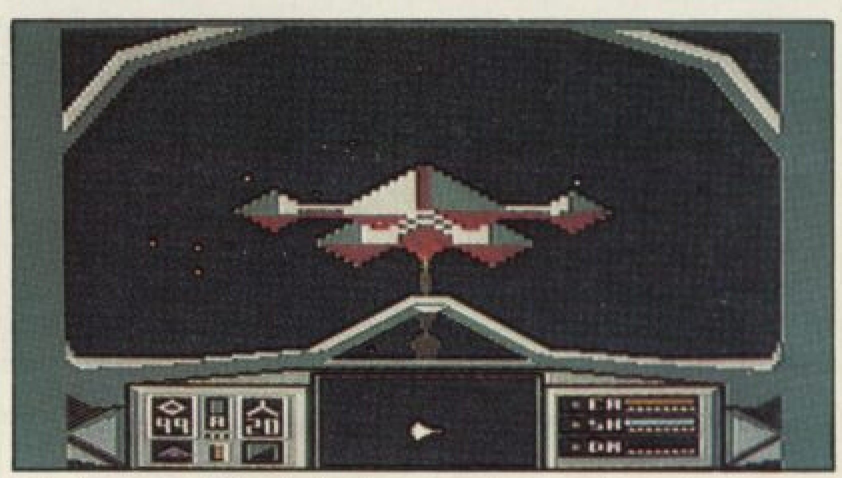
Six months ago they said 'the nerfball has landed' and proclaimed a new, all-American era on the British software scene – but by Christmas the California dreamers of **Electronic Arts** were admitting that things get going slowly in this nation of shopkeepers. And not even boss Trip Hawkins's tension-relieving nerfballs – rubber sponges to squeeze and chuck – could quite cure the embarrassment (or the cash drain). But now Electronic Arts is finally in with a vengeance, following last issue's *Test Drive* and *PHM Pegasus* with titles like *The Train* and *Skyfox II*, sequel to an earlier flight simulator.

When the Xenomorphs attacked the Terran Federation many years ago, it was only the courage of the Federation Warpwarriors and the newly-designed *Skyfox* warplane that stopped them.

And now that the Xenomorphs are on the warpath again, you can guess what's going to join the battle – the player and the latest model of battleship, *Skyfox II*.

A mission-selection screen offers missions from low-risk to high-risk, and three informative options: DESCRIBE tells all about each mission, LEVEL is used to change the difficulty level, and SPECS gives the player information on the new craft.

But the game proper begins with *Skyfox II* sitting in the hanger, and the player/pilot soon has it



whizzing out of the Federation Starbase and off to face the Xenomorphs. The high-tech cockpit display includes the HUD (head-up display, used for targeting), navigation and radar equipment, and power indicators.

The craft is armed with three main offensive weapons: Neutron Disruptors, Photon Pulse Bombs, and Anti-Matter Mines (to lay out a nasty surprise for anyone following the ship). And shields protect it from collisions with enemy fire and asteroids, but power soon diminishes – so watch the energy level.

Heavy combat often leads to severe damage, so finding a friendly starbase to refuel and repair is essential.

Once the mission is completed – or *Skyfox II* is blown to smithereens – a mission-evaluation is made. So good luck, Warpwarrior.

The comprehensive menu system where elements of the forthcoming missions may be selected

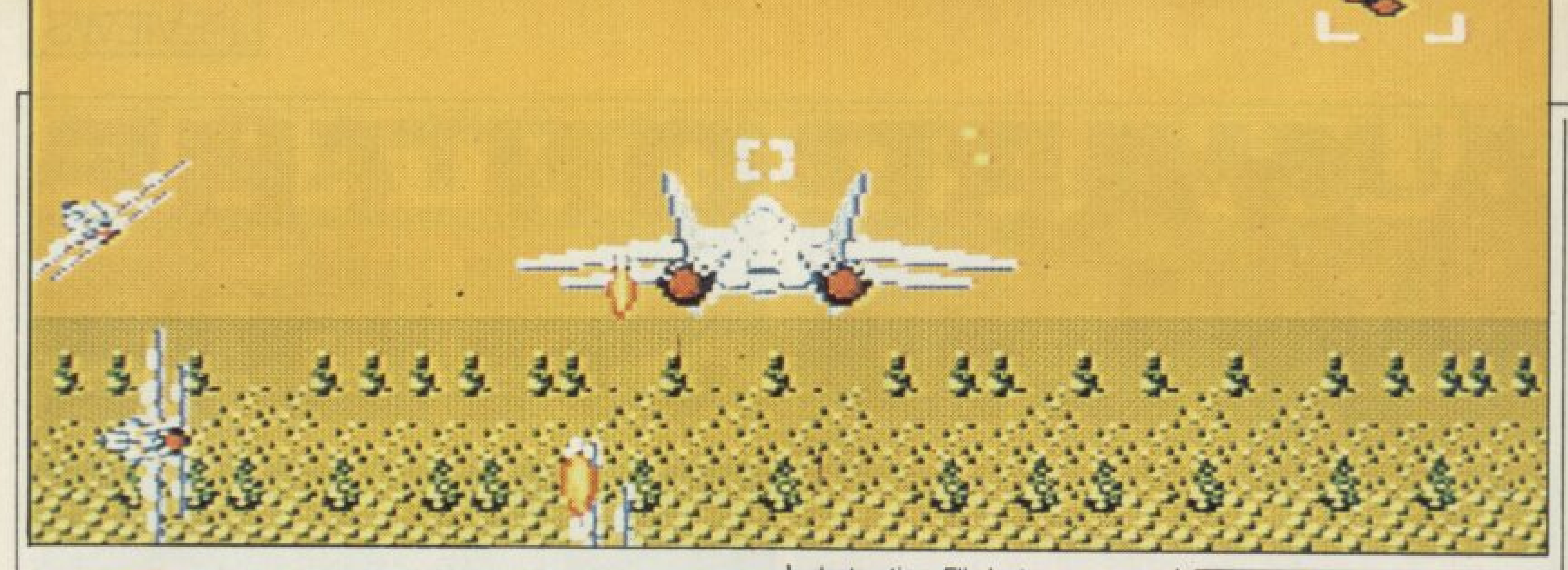
COMMODORE 64
Diskette: £14.95

Skyfox II **is great. Okay, it bears more than a passing resemblance to that ancient blast-'em-up** Star Raiders, **but it's good fun. It takes a long time to get used to some of the functions, but you'll soon find yourself confidently piloting your craft around the galaxy. The graphics are good, particularly on the cockpit display – and in the starfield beyond, which swirls around while you violently throw the** Skyfox II **through its space manoeuvres, trying to avoid those deadly enemy laser bolts. So strap yourself into the seat and go kick some alien backside.**

OVERALL 85%

" . . . the starfield swirls around while you violently throw the Skyfox II **through its manoeuvres . . . "**

PRESS ANY KEY



SKY FIGHTER

AFTER BURNER
Sega

The non-stop, action-packed, air combat coin-op from **Sega** is a very hot item at the moment: **Activision** have the licence to produce a home computer version, the coin-op is proving a financial success in the arcades (see COIN-OP CONFRONTATION in Issue Three of THE GAMES MACHINE) and the Sega console version is now available. A powerful product, *After Burner* looks set to blaze a considerable trail through the software charts this year.

The objective of *After Burner* is very simple: fly across enemy territory on a mission of unbiased destruction. Eliminate wave upon wave of enemy fighters, avoid the constant onslaught of deadly incoming missiles and attempt to stay in one piece!

The F-14 initially looks impressive, but the continuous waves of enemy fighters soon leads to monotony

Viewed from behind, the jet (based on the F-14 Tomcat) banks, climbs and dives through the numerous airborne attacks. Each stage takes the pilot through night and day flight, above the clouds, low over the sea and at tree-top height over the enemy countryside.

The craft is armed with unlimited cannon shells (for close range targets) and heat seeking missiles (for use against distant fighters). Aiming is achieved via a gunsight which hovers directly in front of the jet, and a missile sight that automatically tracks individual fighters.

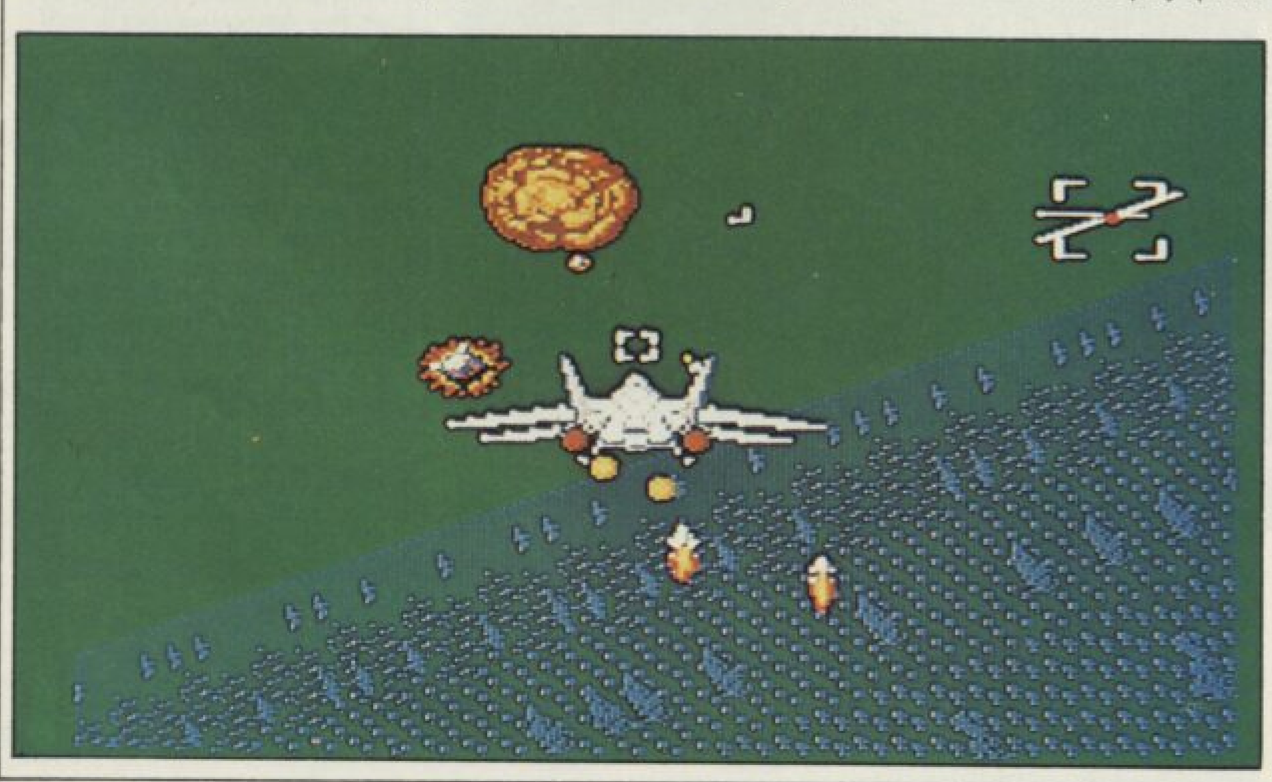
Collision with enemy planes sees the jet explode in a ball of flame; taking a direct missile hit is much more spectacular as the plane goes into a death-dive spewing smoke and flames before ploughing up the scenery below.

It would be foolish to suggest that a conversion of *After Burner* could retain all the features of the coin-op, and Sega's version is no exception. Notable differences between the console version and the coin-op include the lack of a throttle control, runways to land on or canyons to negotiate, and the omission of a continue play option.

SEGA CONSOLE
Two Mega Cartridge only: £24.95

First impressions of After Burner **are promising: the game moves along at quite a speed and the plane sprite is extremely close in graphic quality to its arcade counterpart. However, the same thing can't be said of the ground features. Reduced to endlessly repeating layers of small waves, trees and clouds, they quickly become repetitive, diminishing interest considerably. The in-game tune is pretty feeble, failing to suit the action and proving instantly forgettable. One aspect of the coin-op that's been captured faithfully is the level of difficulty: it's an immense task just to get through each stage without losing a life. Although the hydraulics of the coin-op are impossible to recreate, the omission of runways and the throttle control limit the game's appeal enormously.** After Burner, **like** Out Run **is a mammoth conversion to attempt and inevitably suffers some way during the translation. On the Sega, the game has the speed and the same style of action, but without the incredible graphics it's little more than a fast and very difficult shoot 'em up.**

OVERALL 60%



"Notable differences include the lack of a throttle control, runways to land on or canyons to negotiate, and the omission of a continue play option . . . "

NO-ONE CAN HEAR YOU SCREAM

ALIEN SYNDROME
SEGA

Sega's gruesome, acid splattering and generally quite horrific shoot 'em up now makes its way onto the Sega system itself. As reported last issue, conversions to the 8-bit and 16-bit micros are well under way and look to be released around Easter from **The Edge**. The Commodore version is nearest completion and is looking quite good so far. More news as and when it arrives.



Battling hard against the venom spitting 'end of level' ultimate alien

Alien Syndrome takes the form of a futuristic *Gauntlet* clone, with simultaneous two player action as the heroes, Mary and Ricky, undertake a desperate mission to rescue captured comrades from the bowels of seven alien spaceships. A time bomb has been set on each ship so the duo have to rescue all the prisoners and escape before the current vessel explodes.

A major difference between this and the coin-op game is the lack of a dual player facility, whereby Mary and Ricky take alternate turns at playing the hero.

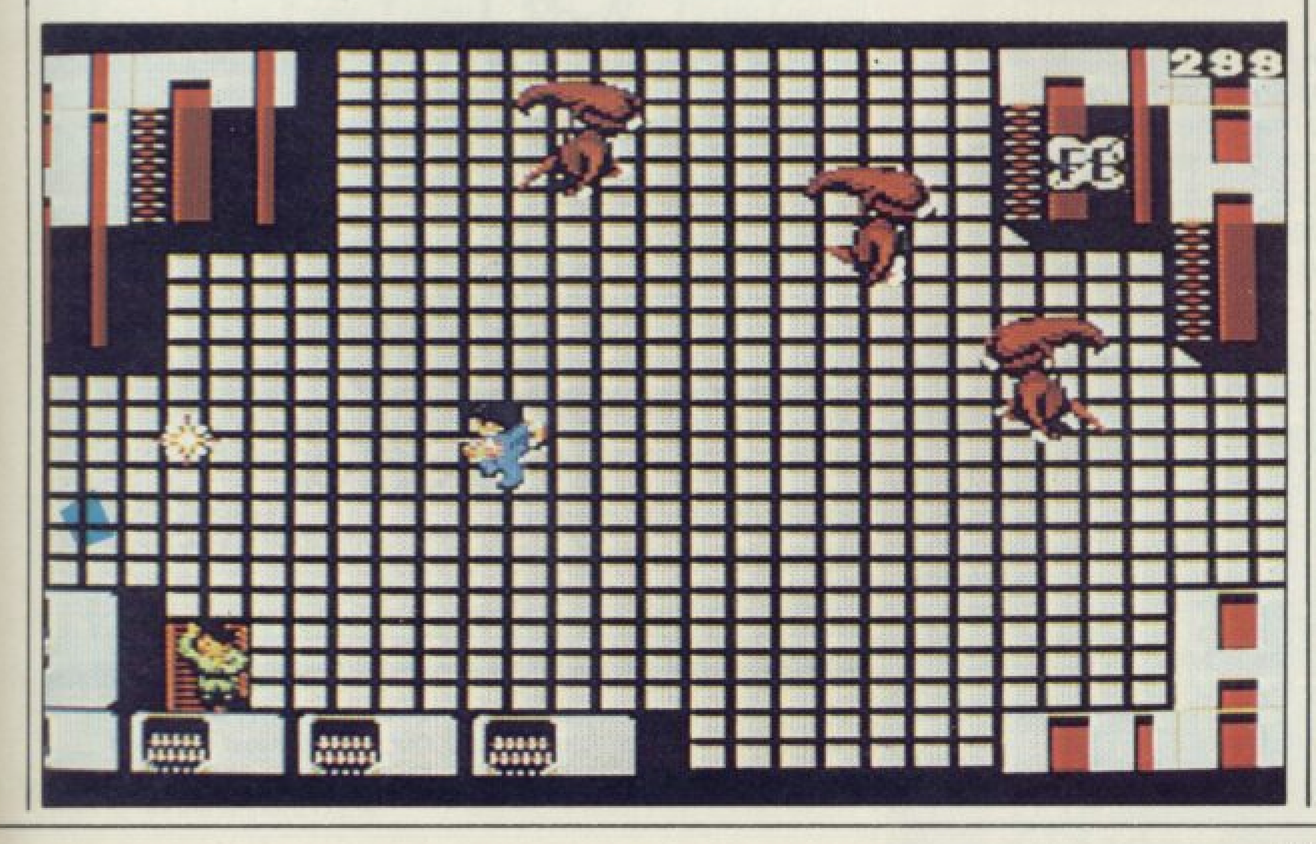
The mission is complicated by the presence of horrible, acid-spitting creatures which look like extras from 'Aliens', who wander the corridors, intent on inflicting grievous bodily harm on Mary and Ricky. To even things out, however, the heroes are armed with blasters, lasers, flamethrowers and smart bombs which are to be found in compartments scattered around ship.

Initially, only ten prisoners need to be rescued, but the number increases as the players progress. As the last hostage is retrieved, the exit to the next level opens up, to reveal yet another alien blocking the way. This large mother-alien not only fires back but also requires numerous hits before exploding in a hail of guts and organic material.

Surviving this conflict signals the start of the next level with faster and more vicious aliens, and less time in which to complete the task. The finale awaits on level seven where an enormous, graphically disgusting and extremely ferocious mother-alien lies in wait . . .

Like *Gauntlet*, *Alien Syndrome* is a multi-directional parallax scrolling coin-op. Surprisingly, this has been abandoned in favour of push-scrolling where the next location slides into view as the player reaches the edge of the last.

Will our hero rescue the imprisoned fellow humans before he falls foul of the surrounding enemy aliens?



SEGA

Two Mega Cartridge: £24.95

Conversions from impressive coin-ops are always a risky business (witness the review of Out Run **in issue three of THE GAMES MACHINE), and although Sega have produced an aesthetically pleasing version of** Alien Syndrome**, it's lost some rather vital features in translation. All the levels are there and much of the gameplay has been retained, but the lack of dual play and the ill-suited push-scrolling knocks the game down a peg or two in general appeal. The graphics are a mixed bag, ranging from the rather basic spaceship corridors to the very impressive mother aliens. The realistic death scream of the coin-op characters has been reduced to a white noise screech which really shows how bad the Sega sound chip is. As a game in its own right, it's not that bad; as a conversion it's lost much of the playability and atmosphere of the coin-op original.**

OVERALL 61%

"A major difference between this and the coin-op game is the lack of a dual player facility . . .

PRESS ANY KEY

EYE OF THE

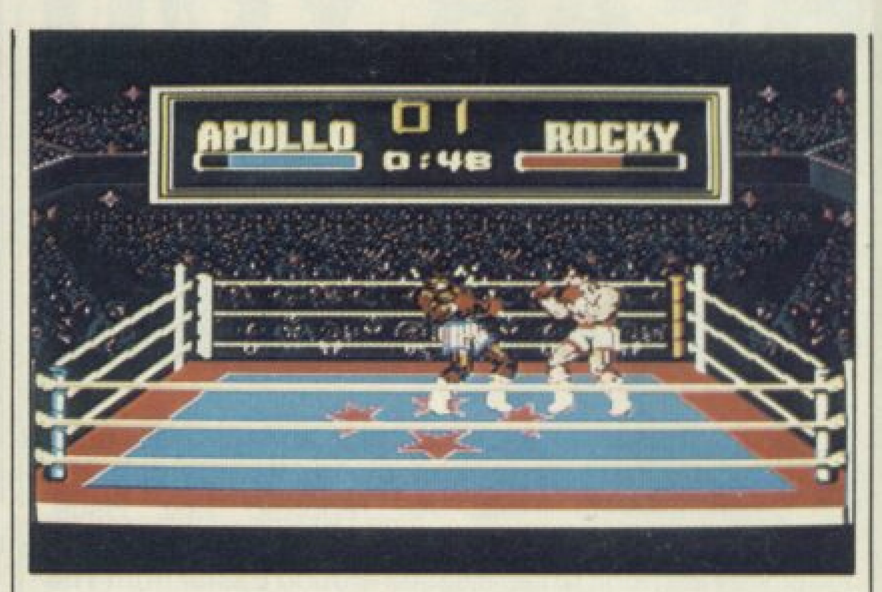
ROCKY
Sega

After his success in the four United Artists films, Rocky Balboa (played by **Sylvester Stallone**) gets the chance to parade his red, white and blue shorts in Sega's officially licensed *Rocky* game.

The action starts with a one or two-player option, where selection of the one-player mode begins Rocky's challenge for the title. Before a fight he undergoes a strenuous training session. In the two-player mode, the second person is given the chance to take the role of Rocky's opponents – Creed, Lang and Drago – and there's no pre-bout training.

Three training sessions are entered, each one taking place before a match, with the purpose of endowing Rocky with the necessary skills to beat each opponent. The objective is to 'qualify' from the session by achieving a set amount of hits within the time limit. The sand bag improves Rocky's punching power in readiness for his fight against Creed; the punching ball improves punching speed for the bout against Lang, and finally the punching mitts improve the accuracy of Rocky's punch for the Drago match. Although the training can be skipped, Rocky will not be 'energised', and the other guys are likely to make mincemeat of him.

During a bout, there are several punches available to the player, including uppercut, hook and straight-on punch. The match consists of 15 rounds, each split into three minute bouts, with a one minute interval at the end of each.



This bout has a familiar ring to it

Energy is displayed as two power meters at the top of the playing screen, one for each boxer. As each successful punch connects with a rival, the power decreases accordingly. If however, the other player's energy is low, a knockdown punch sees them eating canvas and taking a count of ten to recover. Should they beat the count, another two knockdowns during that bout results in a KO, and the end of the game. If the match goes the whole 15 rounds, a winning decision is awarded by the judges.

KNIGHTS IN WHI

ZILLION
Sega

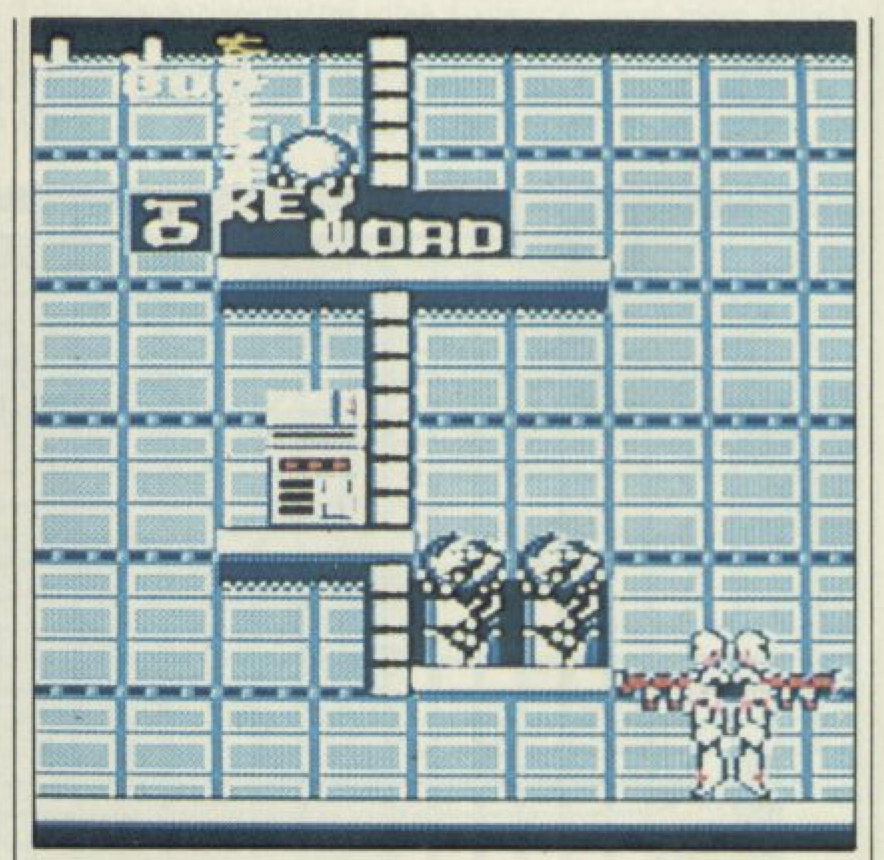
Written in Japan, *Zillion* is one of a small group of original Sega console games having no connection with any earlier coin-op machines. It does, however, bear more than a passing resemblance to **Epyx**' classic platform game, *Impossible mission*. An up-and-coming *Zillion II* draws on ideas from *Zillion*, and there's also the possibility of a *Zillion III* within the year!

The evil Norsa Empire has threatened to enslave the peaceful Planetary System. The player, taking the role of JJ, a member of the legendary White Knights, has to storm the Norsa labyrinth, rescue his friends Apple, Champ and Amy, and find five floppy disks, containing information necessary for the destruction of the Norsa threat.

JJ is directed through the maze of rooms, and jumps obstacles and shoots enemy guards that bar his way. He carries an ID card to tap into the base's computer system, and also the Zillion Lazer – the fabled weapon of the White Knights.

The stronghold is negotiated via corridors and elevators which connect the base's many rooms. Each room contains a computer terminal and cylinders which hold useful items necessary for completion of the mission: key symbols, ID cards, Bread to increase life points and 'Opa-Opas' which increase JJ's power level.

Once sufficient key symbols are collected, JJ taps into the computer system using his ID card. A computer screen appears, requiring an 'input command', and a moveable icon is directed along the key symbols displayed at the bottom of the screen. Inputting the



A frantic search to find the four codes required to instruct the computer to open the door to another level

E TIGER

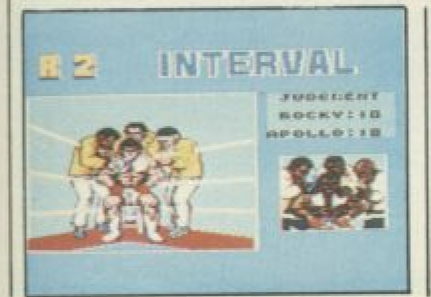
SEGA CONSOLE

Two Mega Cartridge: £24.95

The immediate impression of Rocky **is that it doesn't** ***look*** **like a Sega game: the intro screen is smart, the backdrops are effective (especially as the lights drop around the ringside) and the main sprites are great; very realistic and fairly smooth in operation – even the sprite flicker is limited. Control is nice and simple, although you often have to be quite fast to connect a punch before your opponent, and later contenders prove quite a handful. The training sequences are a somewhat limited and add little to the overall gameplay, which is at its best in the ring. A decent boxing game, marred only by its lasting appeal.**

OVERALL 79%

Mister Stallone looks decidedly rocky as he's about to face Creed



"The immediate impression of Rocky **is that it doesn't** ***look*** **like a Sega game. . . . "**

TE SATIN

SEGA CONSOLE

Mega Cartridge: £19.95

Whether intentional or not, Zillion **is very reminiscent of Epyx'** Impossible Mission **– down to the searching for and collection of key symbols, and their consequent deciphering to allow access to computer terminals. The action is a little repetitive, but the blend of hectic blasting action, platform precision and logical problem solving proves very addictive; many games and plenty of reams of paper will be needed to solve it. Graphically the game is good, but while the main sprites move well, the ever-present Sega glitch is in operation, especially around the legs, which very often disappear altogether. An unusual Sega release – one to look out for.**

OVERALL 76%

correct sequence of symbols initiates the computer. If the wrong sequence is entered an error message flashes with a request to try again. JJ only gets three attempts before the computer denies further access, and the current ID card is lost.

Only once the five disks have been found can the main computer system be shut down in order to foil the Norsa's plans.

"Zillion **bears more than a passing resemblance to Epyx' classic platform game,** Impossible Mission . . . "

FIVE MARQUES

TEST DRIVE
Accolade/Electronic Arts

Commodore **Cassette: £9.95**
Diskette: £14.95
Atari ST **Diskette: £24.95**

The Amiga version of *Test Drive* was reviewed in Issue Three of THE GAMES MACHINE, and achieved the respectable mark of 69% – unfortunately, the amazing graphics overshadowed the rather shallow gameplay. Atari ST and Commodore 64 owners can now ignore speed limits and crash expensive sports cars to their hearts content with these faithful conversions from the Amiga original.

And you may find yourself . . . at the wheel of a large automobile – Atari ST screen



COMMENT

The main talking point of the Amiga game was undoubtedly the very attractive graphics, but now with the release of the ST Test Drive **it's a case of 'anything you can do'. Sound is limited to single tone engine noises, the colour shading doesn't blend as well as it could and the jerky animation is practically identical. On the plus side, however, the road movement is smoother, slightly faster in operation and the disk accessing between stages has been thankfully eliminated. The biggest problem with** Test Drive **is the lack of gameplay: the Rock is still the same – repetitive, graphically basic and with a distinct lack of variety and lasting challenge. Even a novice ST games-player shouldn't find it too hard to get through to the end. A very competent, but ultimately unexciting release.**

ATARI ST
OVERALL 67%

FROM RUSSIA LOVE

TETRIS
Mirrorsoft

Amiga **Diskette: £19.99**

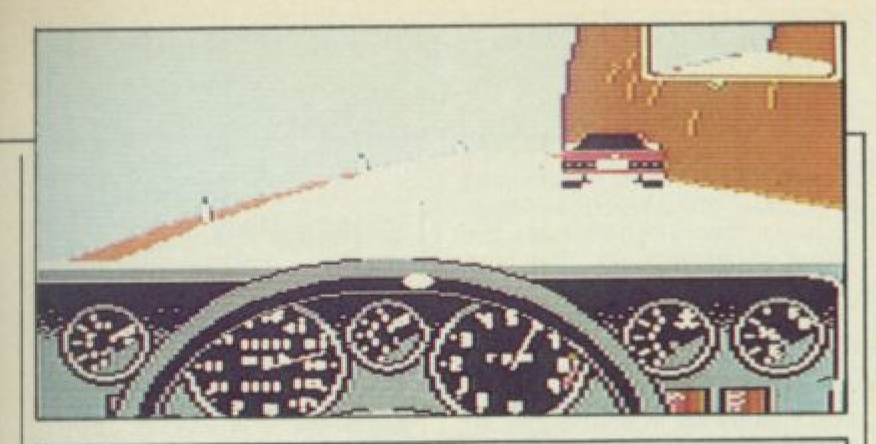
Mirrorsoft's fiendishly addictive Russian import makes its debut on the Amiga, the conversion written by **John Jones-Steele** from an idea originally developed in Moscow University on an IBM. A suitable **Dave Whittaker** soundtrack accompanies the puzzling action.

The objective is to continually fit falling blocks together as they come to rest on the lowest part of the screen. Six differently shaped blocks appear and fall at a preset speed, dependent on which of the nine playing levels is selected. The player attempts to interlock them and form a horizontal line, and every time a continuous line is created (at any position within the block), the line disappears and the remaining blocks all move down one character space. The game ends when the the tower of blocks reaches the top of the screen.

Each block may be moved from side to side as it falls, and rotated through 90 degrees by pressing the fire button. A block may also be dropped instantly by pulling back on the joystick, To help in planning tactics, while one block is falling, the next block due to appear is shown to the side of the main screen.



Deceptively simple gameplay resides in this very addictive game – Amiga screen



COMMENT

Conversions down the micro scale, from more powerful machines, are invariably disappointing due to the marked graphical and sonical differences. The 64 Test Drive on the other hand, stands up remarkably well. It's surprising how much of the Amiga game has been captured in this conversion. The overall graphical effect is very good (considering the 64's capabilities), the car selection screens are impressive, each car's dashboard is neatly represented and there's a reasonable impression of movement, easily comparable with the larger machines, although oncoming traffic looks rather blocky and it's quite easy to oversteer on sharp bends. The solitary, winding road doesn't exactly give the game long term appeal but the five cars on offer add some badly needed variety to the game, but still not enough to sustain interest once completed. Test Drive has its faults, not least of which are the limited gameplay and lack of track variation, but as a first person racing game it's well worth considering for purchase.

COMMODORE
OVERALL 72%

" . . . it's surprising how much of the Amiga game has been captured in this 64 conversion . . . "

A WITH

COMMENT

The main visual difference from the original is that the screen appears far more cluttered. Apart from the main panel, the screen displays the score, current level, the number of lines built, Stats (number of biocks fallen), help (informs you of the keyboard controls) and shows which type of block is going to fall next. The blocks have been given an isometric perspective in this version, which seems rather pointless as it makes it slightly more difficult to judge where they'll land. The soundtrack, which plays throughout the game, is a pleasant one but neither helps nor hinders the gameplay. Tetris doesn't have the appearance of highly addictive and enjoyable puzzle game until it's been played a few times. From then on there'll be no stopping you from returning to it time and time again.

AMIGA
OVERALL 90%

OTHER VERSIONS

All formats should be available by the time you read this, and they are: Spectrum (£7.99 cass, £12.99 disk); Commodore 64/128 (£9.99 cass, £12.99 disk); Amstrad CPC (£9.99, £12.99 disk); Amstrad PCW (£14.99 disk); IBM PC (£19.99 disk); Atari ST (£19.99 disk). Some versions may vary in presentation but the game remains the same.

"The blocks have been given an isometric perspective which makes it slightly more difficult to judge where they'll land . . . "

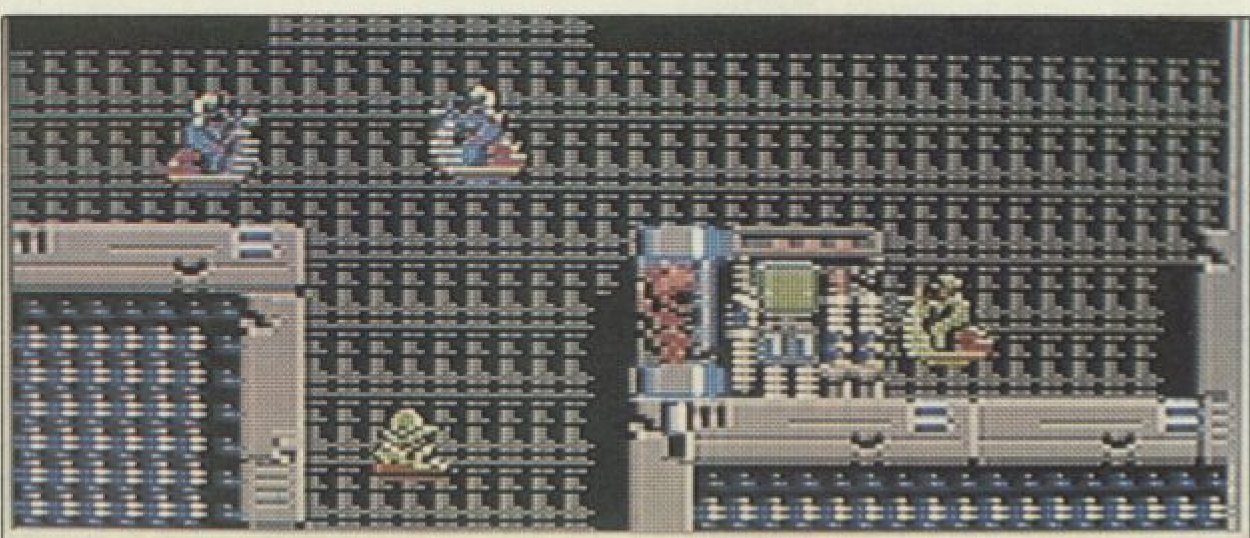
WILL THE MEKON INHERIT THE EARTH?

DAN DARE II
Virgin Games

Commodore 64/128
Diskette: £12.95
Cassette: £9.95

Dan Dare II allows the player to take the role of either steely Dan or his deadly enemy, the sinister Mekon.

The Mekon's ship, which is once again threatening Earth, houses deadly Supertreens enclosed in plexiglass life-support bubbles. Depending on which character the player chooses, the mission is to either destroy all the Supertreens before each of the four levels of the ship self-destruct, or activate their life support control boxes and jettison them into space, out of Dan's clutches. In both cases, all Supertreens must be dealt with and each level evacuated before the irreversible explosion takes place.



COMMENT

The speed of movement in Dan Dare II **is very impressive. Whether you play the Mekon or Dan, the animation of the sprites on their little booster scooters is realistic, slick and glitch-free; in fact, visually,** Dan Dare II **is extremely neat. The game is played at a hectic pace (if you want to get anywhere) and, although lacking a little in depth and backdrop variety, it's involving enough and has sufficient enticement to ensure a good slice of addiction.**

COMMODORE 64/128

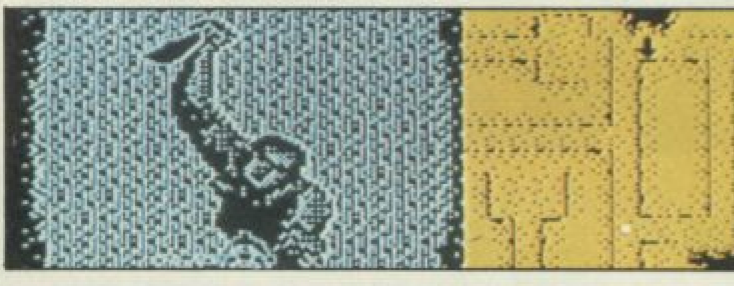
OVERALL 72%

" . . . the animation of the sprites on their little booster scooters is realistic, slick and glitch-free . . . "

VERSION UPDATE

WAR IS WELL

PLATOON
Ocean



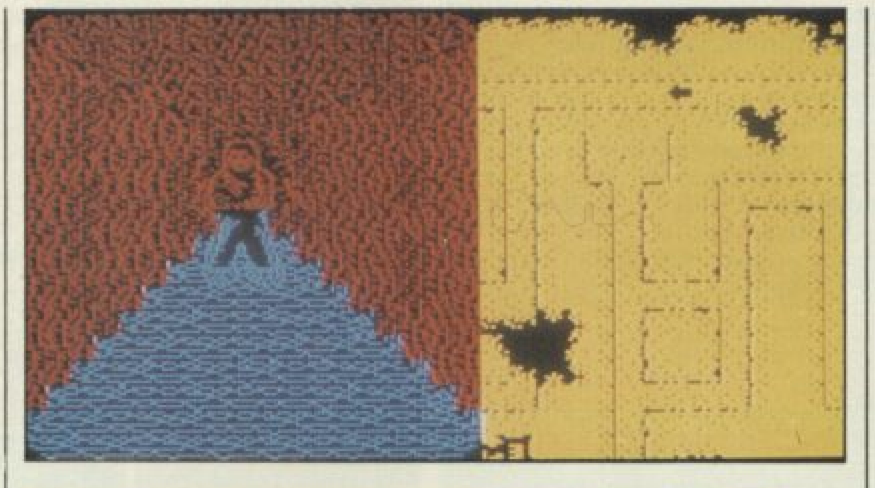
Jungle warfare's just as atmospheric on the Spectrum

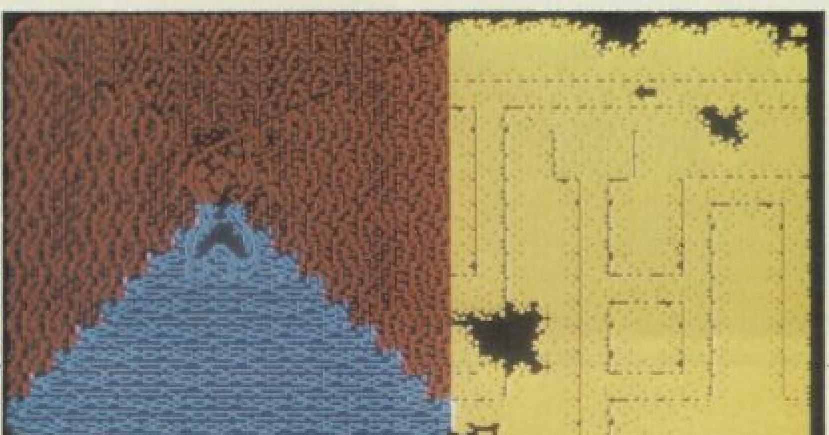
Spectrum Cassette: £9.95
Diskette: £14.95

THE DEBUT release of *Platoon* on the Commodore 64 earned it 92% in Issue Three of THE GAMES MACHINE, and now Choice Software delivers Ocean's Vietnam film licence on the Spectrum.

The five sections of *Platoon* pit the player, an American 'grunt' soldier, against enemies on both sides: the communist Viet Cong and the crazed American Sergeant Barnes. The gameplay ranges from straightforward shooting to a demanding, mappable arcade adventure set in tunnels bored by the Viet Cong troops.

Choice Software's Spectrum *Platoon* team consists of S Pearce and D Lyttle; David Whittaker helped out with the music and sound effects. (Choice is also responsible for the Amstrad and 16-bit conversions.) 128K-Spectrum--owners get the entire game in one load, but 48K-owners have to endure three loads.

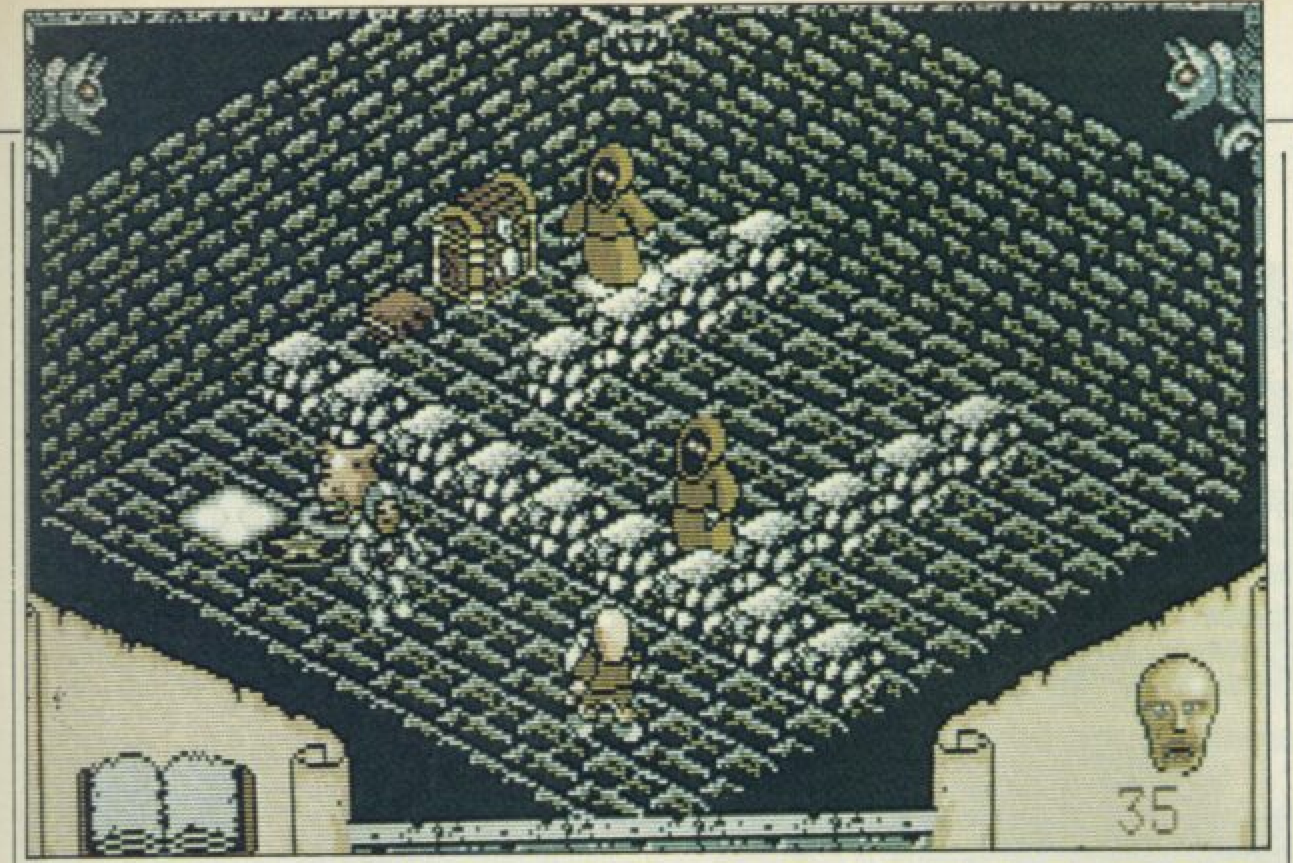




COMMENT

It was risky converting Platoon **to the Spectrum – particularly because the graphics rely heavily on dark, subtle colours to recreate the depressing atmosphere of jungle and tunnel warfare. But colour is used extensively, without much attribute clash, giving the game a remarkable atmosphere. And there's considerable speed in this version, especially in the tunnel scene, which works just as well as the 64 version despite monochrome colour. The tune with the 128K version is good, too. Each stage is highly playable, addictive, incredibly tough and a great game in itself – the challenge of *Platoon* is formidable.**

SPECTRUM 48/128
OVERALL 84%



THAT OLD BLACK MAGIC

WARLOCK
The Edge

Atari ST **Diskette: £14.95**

Originally released on the Amstrad, *Warlock* now makes the journey onto the Atari ST through the coding prowess of **James Hawkins** and the graphical skill of **Tahir Rashid**. But does it spell success for **The Edge**?

For once, the player is the bad guy – Doomlord, Warlock of castle Doomrock. The Forces of Good have invaded Doomrock and are attempting to oust Doomlord from his castle forever. To evict these unwelcome quests, Doomlord searches his castle's many rooms for the ultimate weapon, known as the Orb of Power.

To defend himself, the Warlock uses magic missile spells to destroy the vile creatures of Good, which wander the corridors of the castle. Fighting and movement costs energy but is simply restored by eating food. When all strength is lost, so is the Warlock.

COMMENT

Warlock **is graphically reminiscent of** Fairlight **(also from The Edge and coming soon to the Atari ST) but it lacks the puzzles and overall polish that made** Fairlight **such a classic. The graphics are attractive and use colour quite well to present a suitably grey, drab castle interior. Unfortunately, everything moves too slowly and the short pause between screens doesn't help. Although the perspective 3D is good, it often proves difficult to negotiate, making movement very frustrating. Musical accompaniment is non-existent and other sonic effects are minimal, the only sound being the plodding footsteps of the Warlock. The omission of extensive sound effects and limited gameplay make** Warlock **a rather disappointing release.**

ATARI ST
OVERALL 54%

"The graphics are attractive and use colour quite well . . ."

I'LL HAVE A SLEIGH PLEASE, BOB

BOBSLEIGH
Digital Integration

Amstrad **Cassette: £9.95**
Diskette: £14.95

Digital Integration's latest release simulates one of the fastest and most dangerous Olympic Winter Sports – the Bobsleigh Run. Starting off on the amateur circuit with the minimum of sponsorship money, it's up to the player to participate and win races in a bid to become best bobsleigh team in the world. Cash is constantly required for improving the bob, training the team and repairing any damage taken during a run. Win races to gain sponsorship money while avoiding bankruptcy.

Using a first person 'cockpit' view, the player controls the bob as it thunders down six ice tracks. Hairpin bends, sharp corners and high-speed straights provide the challenge, but time is the real enemy and only by beating the qualification times can the player work through to the Olympic series itself.

COMMENT

Bobsleigh **is an enjoyable game to play. Racing down the ice runs is great fun and probably as realistic as could be expected (who's ever been in a bobsleigh?). The six tracks with their different danger zones and tricky corners add a good deal of variety to the game and the increasingly faster qualification times make this no pushover. The sensation of racing works quite well, although the tracks are graphically basic with vector graphics providing the 3D track display. Reaching the finish is quite easy, but beating the qualification times takes considerable skill and a large chunk of nerve. Striking a balance between careful cash management and skilful bob riding is the secret to success in** Bobsleigh **and the Load/Save feature is a welcome addition. Fans of the Cresta Run should enjoy this game but like most sport simulations, it can only have limited appeal.**

AMSTRAD CPC
OVERALL 72%

"Fans of the Cresta Run should enjoy this . . ."

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT WAS SAFE TO GO BACK IN THE AIR . . .

FLYING SHARK
Firebird

Amstrad

Cassette: £9.99
Diskette: £14.99

Firebird's conversion of Taito's coin-op has now arrived for the Amstrad CPC range. The Spectrum and Commodore versions were fully reviewed in the last issue of THE GAMES MACHINE, and Amstrad *Flying Shark* has the same storyline and features. The mission objective is simply to fly over a vertically scrolling enemy landscape and shoot everything in sight.



COMMENT

Surprisingly, the Amstrad version has fared very well indeed. Essentially it plays and looks (although it does use four colours) exactly like the Spectrum version. The detail on the graphics are of a very high standard and the scenery scrolls smoothly with no loss of speed. For Amstrad-owning fans of the arcade original, it comes highly recommended, and even for those who don't know the Taito game, it should still prove to be one of the better blasts on the Amstrad.

AMSTRAD CPC
OVERALL 80%

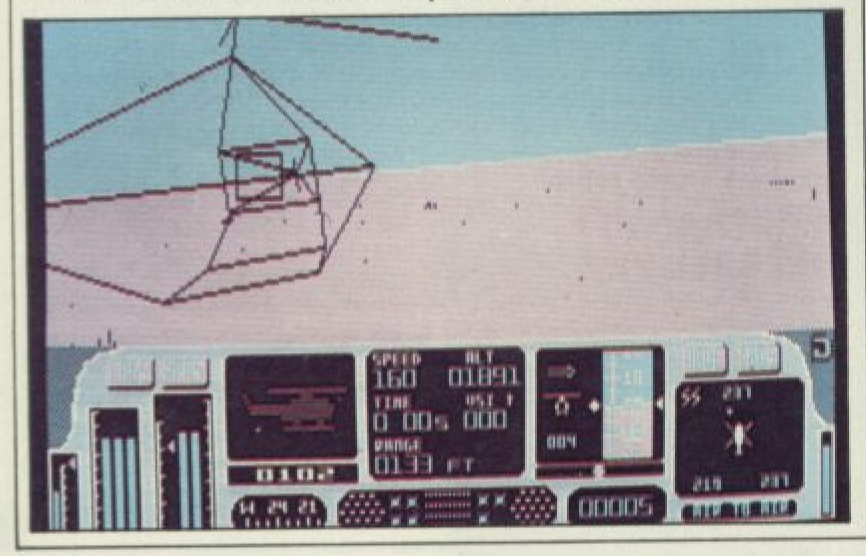
"For Amstrad-owning fans of the arcade original, Flying Shark **comes highly recommended . . . "**

APACHE ON THE REAL THING?

GUNSHIP
Microprose

IBM PC **Diskette: £34.95**

Microprose's highly acclaimed AH-64 Apache simulator has been around on the 64 for some time and has recently met with similar praise on the Spectrum. PC owners can now take to the skies with the latest version of this remarkable flight simulator. For facts fans, the PC version was used in the Microprose AH-64 Apache Simulator at last year's PCW show, proving a star attraction at the show (alongside 'Wild' Bill Stealey himself).



COMMENT

Gunship **is the definitive combat helicopter simulator. Its mixture of strategy, variable combat factors (including higher skill levels) and incredible depth have already made it very popular on the smaller machines. PC** Gunship **has been worth the wait. To get the most out of the game, however, installation of an EGA graphics adaptor is recommended. The full, superlative effect of flight can only be realised with sixteen colours, compared with the pinks, magentas, harsh white and grey shadings of the CGA mode. The flight controls tend to be sluggish, especially when using the collective to dive or climb, but since real helicopters (and most aircraft) are slow in response this could be classed as a highly realistic feature. The sensation of movement is what we've come to expect from Microprose, with the smooth-running graphics having a marked improvement in speed over the 8-bit releases. A worthy purchase for your PC – if you can stomach the price tag.**

IBM PC
OVERALL 81%

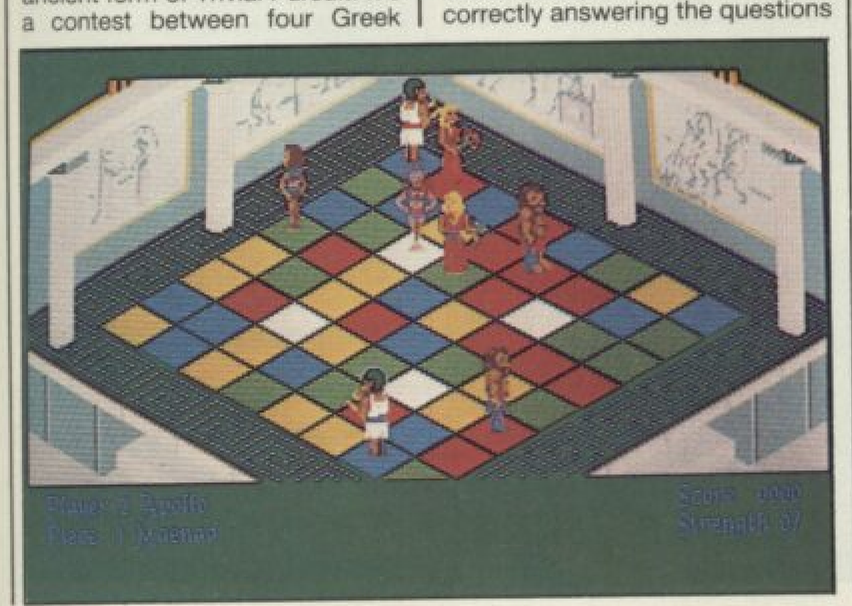
" . . . an EGA graphics adaptor is recommended – the full, superlative effect of flight can only be realised with sixteen colours . . . "

GIFT FROM THE GODS

POWERPLAY
Arcana

Atari ST Diskette: £19.99
Amiga Diskette: £19.99

Originally released on the BBC, Commodore and Amstrad, *Powerplay* is somewhat akin to an ancient form of *Trivial Pursuit*. It's a contest between four Greek Gods – Apollo, Hermes, Hecate and Aphrodite – to determine who is the wisest. Taking these divine roles, up to four players may participate, the objective being to accumulate points and strength by correctly answering the questions posed by Zeus. With every 25 points scored, players have the opportunity to mutate into a more powerful character which improves their chances in a challenge – where two players attempt to answer a randomly selected question the fastest. The losing character is mutated down a grade, and if already at the lowest level, becomes expelled from the game. The winner is the first one to eradicate all opposing players.



COMMENT

The main difference between the 16 and 8-bit versions are the three challenge scenes, which add more variety to the proceedings. Playing Powerplay **against the computer alone can become rather annoying as you begin the game with four characters at the lowest point of the mutation scale, while the computer's team comprises of some the best and most powerful characters.** Powerplay **is a worthy game, with some humour in the character animation, but it tends to lack excitement and can only be enjoyed to the full when be played against a friend or three. Apart from that, it's graphically pleasing, but sonically dull: the sound effects don't amount to an awful lot and are practically identical on both Amiga and ST.**

ATARI ST
AMIGA
OVERALL 76%

"It's a contest between four Greek Gods – Apollo, Hermes, Hecate and Aphrodite – to determine who is the wisest . . ."

JUMP TO IT!

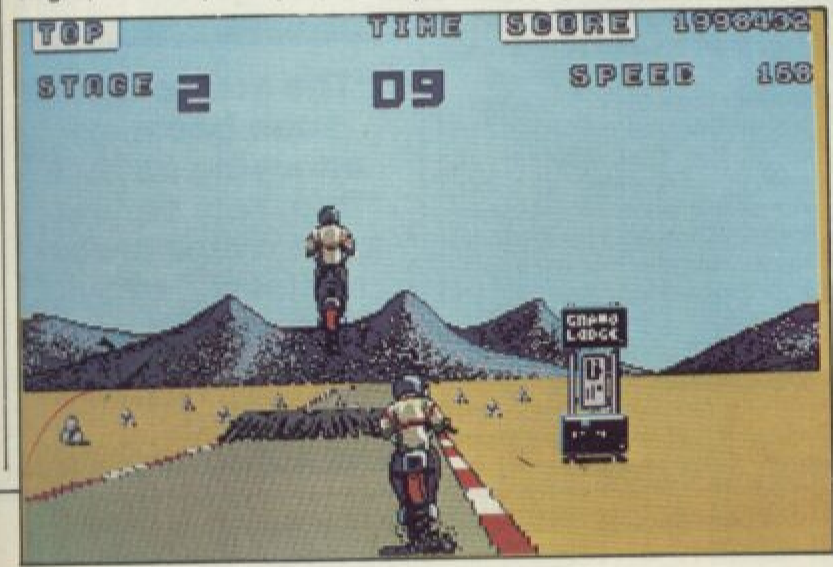
ENDURO RACER
Activision

Atari ST Diskette: £14.99

The current line of Sega coin-op conversions continues with the Atari ST release of *Enduro Racer*, the dirt bike racing game programmed by **Giga Games**, with graphics by **Focus** and music by accomplished 8-bit musician, **David Whittaker**.

Take control of a dirt bike in a race against the opposition through five different scenic stages; use ramps to jump over obstacles, pull wheelies, swerve round rocks and hug the track in a bid to cross the finishing line first. Each stage has to be completed within a set time limit if the player is to qualify. Collisions with other road users, rocks on the course or obstacles on the roadside temporarily halts progress, wasting valuable seconds. Make it through to the next stage and a time bonus is added. Later stages include new hazards such as rivers to be jumped, bushes on the course and the appearance of cars on the track.

Enduro Racer has had something of a mixed history on the home computer front: the Spectrum version proved amazingly faithful to the coin-op despite the colour restrictions; the Amstrad version although good, was little improvement over the Spectrum game, and the 64 version was an unmitigated disaster.



COMMENT

An annoying feature with ST Enduro Racer **is the biker's size: it's rather large and obscures oncoming hazards. The bike and course graphics themselves are colourful, detailed and move with a fair amount of realism. The road in particular scrolls along smoothly, with the sensation of hills and dips in the track adding to the game's authenticity and appeal. David Whittaker's tunes are enjoyable and add a lively note to the game. Among the many options available to the player (including a superfluous save game-screen to disk facility), the ability to change the mouse response speed is a welcome extra. There's little difference between mouse and joystick control as they both work well, but unfortunately, even with the high level of gameplay and wealth of options, it's all far too easy. The course is undemanding, doesn't contain enough hazards and for some strange reason, the player can go through other bikers. The lack of serious challenge is a major flaw in what is otherwise a reasonably polished game.**

ATARI ST
OVERALL 52%

"The lack of serious challenge is a major flaw in what is otherwise a reasonably polished game."

FLYING TONIGHT

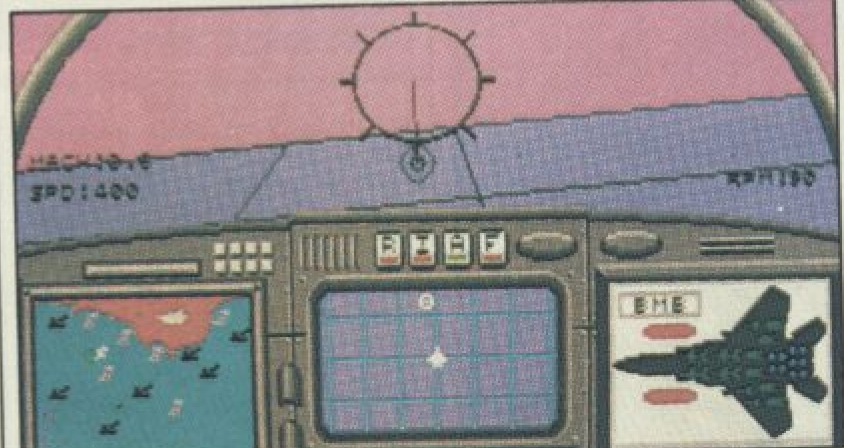
F-15 STRIKE EAGLE
Microprose

Atari ST **Diskette: £24.95**

F-15 Strike Eagle was originally released on the 64 and the Atari 8-bit series over three years ago. Atari ST owners have had to wait slightly longer for their version to appear, but it's here at last – was it worth the wait? Converted by **Digital Illusions**, *F-15 Strike Eagle* was originally designed by **Sid Meier**, a name familiar to Microprose fans as the designer of such previous Microprose products as *Silent Service*, *Solo Flight* and *Gunship* (reviewed on the PC in this issue).

F-15 Strike Eagle takes the player through eight missions over enemy territory, engaging fighter jets, avoiding incoming missiles and bombing airfields, SAM sites and other strategic targets. Each mission is set in a different region, from missions over Iraq, Vietnam and Syria through to modern day missions over Libya and the Persian Gulf.

A very disappointing conversion of a once-competent flight simulator



COMMENT

Microprose simulations are normally something worth waiting for, anticipation being especially high for 16-bit conversions. What a disappointment then, to see the Atari ST conversion containing little in the way of improvements over the original 64 game. The enemy Migs are now solid graphics, there's a mouse control option and the speed is obviously somewhat quicker, but it's still the same, rather basic, air combat game of three years ago. The omission of terrain features, leaving just the plain horizon, is a major mistake considering what the ST can do. Much more was expected of the ST version than this, and to be frank, F-15 Strike Eagle **has not been worth the wait.**

ATARI ST
OVERALL 39%

"To be frank, F-15 Strike Eagle **has not been worth the wait."**

WHITE KNIGHT TAKES BLACK'S CASTLE

DARK CASTLE
Mirrorsoft

Amiga **Diskette: £24.95**

Enter the platforms and ladders world of *Dark Castle* – if you dare.

Journey through dungeons, laboratories and caves, fighting off rats, bats and magicians until you eventually come face to face with the ultimate challenge: the Black Knight.

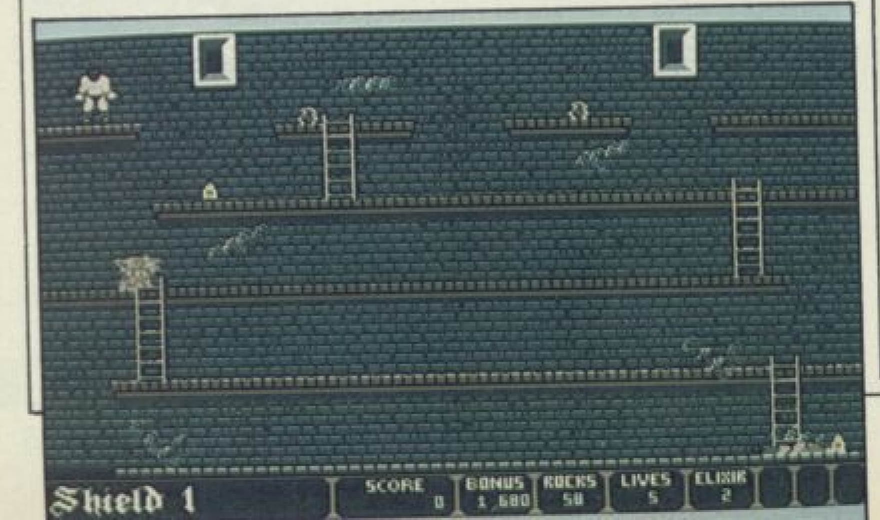
Initially, rocks are all you have to defend yourself with, although magic weapons and elixirs are scattered throughout the game to aid your efforts. 14 zones of ladder-climbing, rope-swinging and rock-throwing must be successfully negotiated before the Black Knight himself can be tackled.

COMMENT

The only real noticeable differences between the PC and Amiga versions of Dark Castle **are the improved graphics and sound in the latter. The gameplay is frustrating and the control of the main character is difficult to master. The stereo sound becomes annoying after playing for a while, as bats flap, rats squeak and whips crack endlessly, urging the player to use the volume control on the monitor.** Dark Castle **is the first attempt at games software by the American company, Silicon Beach Software. Hopefully their second effort will be an improvement.**

AMIGA
OVERALL 55%

"The stereo sound soon becomes annoying as bats flap, rats squeak and whips crack endlessly, urging the player to go for the volume control . . ."



Traverse that platform, climb that ladder – Amiga screen

SHARP AS A KNIFE

JOE BLADE
Players

Atari ST **Diskette: £9.99**

Joe Blade marks the first budget Atari ST release for **Players**. Originally released last year for the Spectrum, Commodore and Amstrad, *Joe Blade* was reasonably well received.

The ST version follows the same gameplay, with Joe Blade, a clean, mean fighting machine, being sent into the evil Crax Bloodfinger's encampment of dungeons to rescue six world leaders.

The action is viewed from the side, as Joe explores the flick-screen base in search of the captives while overcoming the guards with his semi-automatic machine gun. The stronghold is protected by six booby-trapped explosives, all of which are deactivated by reassembling the access code.

Many objects are scattered around the complex, the most useful being extra ammunition, food supplies and an an enemy uniform, allowing Joe to wander freely around the dungeons without attracting the guards' attention.



COMMENT

Joe Blade **has converted exceedingly well to the ST with a good line in graphics, which follow the almost humorous approach of its predecessors. Retaining its simplistic shoot-and-search approach makes it an enjoyable game to map out and complete relatively easily.**

ATARI ST
OVERALL 72%

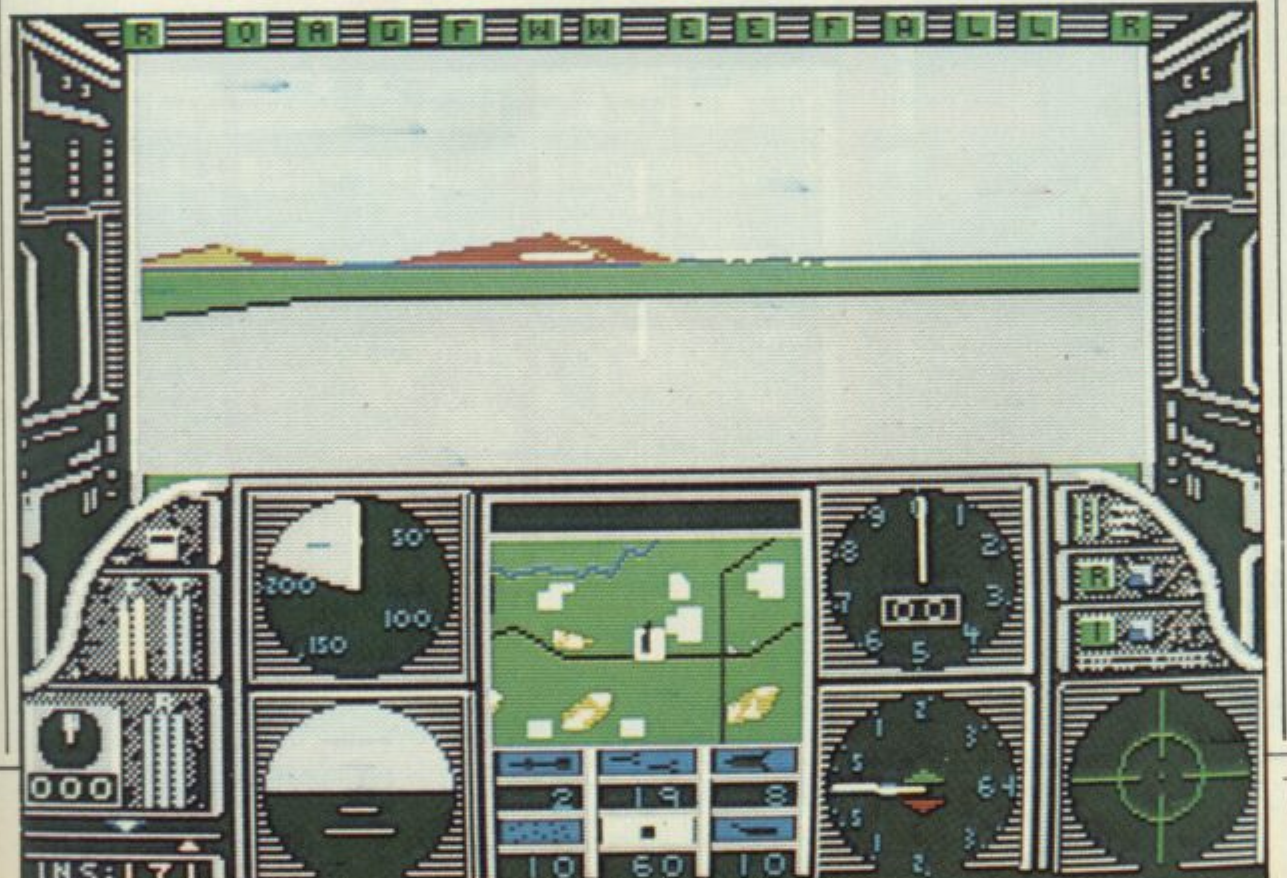
"Joe Blade, a clean, mean fighting machine"

FLYING AXE

TOMAHAWK
Digital Integration

IBM PC Diskette: **£24.95**

The AH-64 Apache helicopter seems to be the in-thing on the PC, with the release of both *Gunship* and *Tomahawk* this month. First appearing on the Spectrum in late 1985, *Tomahawk* met with immediate success. Its high quality sensation of flight, fast-moving wireframe graphics and incredible realism made up for the lack of challenge in the missions, and since its release, *Tomahawk*'s success has resulted in CBM 64, Atari 800, Amstrad CPC and PCW versions. The latest addition to the family was written by **M Goodey.**



COMMENT

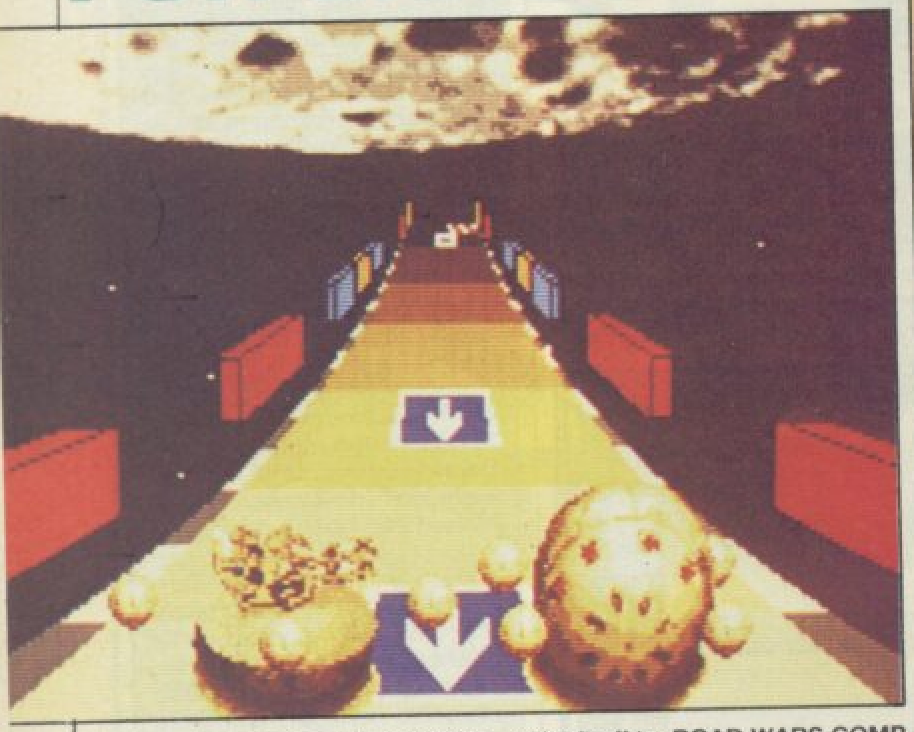
Tomahawk **now appears rather dated due to the lack of content in the missions. The graphics work well and the flight sensation is still as impressive as it was two years ago, but there's precious little else to it. As it stands,** Tomahawk **is no major improvement over the original 8-bit versions; the speed of execution is significantly faster but that's about all. There's no shaded graphics, little or no refinements (although the 'ability' to fly through mountains has been rectified) and surprisingly, no further tasks or missions have been added. The possibilities of improving** Tomahawk **for the PC were endless, but unfortunately it's an opportunity sadly missed. Yet another conversion which fails to make effective use of the PC's power.**

IBM PC
OVERALL 57%

"Tomahawk **is no major improvement over the original 8-bit versions"**

FIGHT YOUR OWN ROAD WARS

20 COPIES OF MELBOURNE HOUSE'S NEW ARCADE CONVERSION UP FOR GRABS



Hot from the Arcadia coin-op comes *Road Wars*. One or two players guide battlespheres – round, impressively-armoured vehicles – along Armageddon Moon's long, straight road and smash and blast anything that gets in their way.

The game is already available on the Spectrum, and conversions for the Commodore 64/128, Amstrad, Atari ST and Amiga are imminent – and we've got 20 to give away!

All you have to do is solve the puzzle below. Write the answer on the back of a postcard or sealed envelope and whizz it off to: **ROAD WARS COMP, THE GAMES MACHINE, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE, SY8 1DB** to arrive before 17th March. Don't forget to state which computer you own!

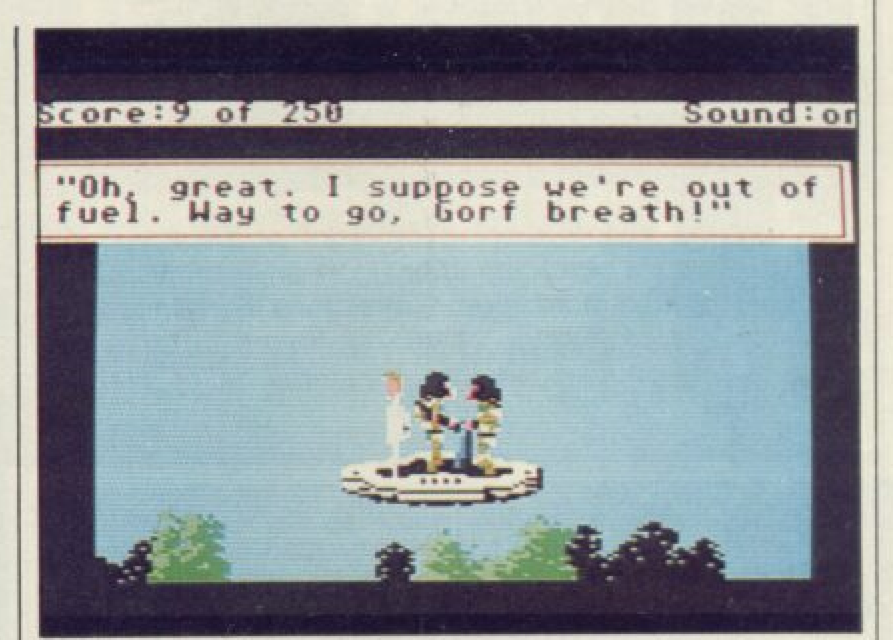
If Melbourne House produce 150,000 copies of Road Wars**, of which one in every eight copies was an Atari ST version, how much would it cost one person to buy all the Atari ST versions at a 10% discount?**

ROB STEEL'S GETTING ADVENTUROUS

SPACE QUEST II – VOHAUL'S REVENGE

Sierra On-line Inc
ATARI ST Diskette: £19.99
AMIGA Diskette: £19.99
IBM PC Diskette: £19.99

Ken and Roberta Williams are best known in the UK for their adventures, but they've been creating leisure and business software from an American base since 1980. Their first game, *Mystery House*, was made known to the public via a small ad in a local magazine – and to their surprise and delight it eventually sold more than 10,000 copies. A family business was formed and christened Sierra On-Line Inc. With successes such as *The Wizard And The Princess* and *Mission Asteroid* under its belt the company quickly expanded. Today, Sierra employs nearly 80 people in very grand offices, although Roberta and Ken maintain a homely working atmosphere. This month THE GAMES MACHINE features *Space Quest II* and *Police Quest* from Sierra.



Uh-oh, out of gas and it's a long way down . . .

Space Quest II – Vohaul's Revenge follows the adventures of sanitation engineer Roger Wilko (the 'hero' of *Space Quest I*). Wilko is captured by the evil Sludge Vohaul, who informs him of his devilish plans to dump hordes of life-insurance salesmen on his home planet – and gloats that this time Roger won't be able to stop him. The unfortunate Wilko is to be transported to the mines of Labion for a life sentence of hard labour.

But during Wilko's forced journey to Labion he gets his chance to escape. His escorts have neglected to refuel the hovercraft which is taking him to the mining site, and after spluttering over the treetops of a Labion forest the craft coughs and dies, sending the two guards and Roger hurtling to the ground.

Luckily our hero is saved by the cushioning effect of one of the goon's bodies. This is where the adventure proper begins.

HILARIOUS

Space Quest II is hilarious. From the opening sequence outside the space station – Roger is sweeping up and inadvertently lets go of his broom, allowing it to drift away into deep space ('That's the third one this week!' shrieks the supervisor) – to the conversation between the two goons as they realise their hovercraft is out of fuel, the animation, text and overall appearance of the game had me crying with laughter.

The Sierra programmers have a keen eye for detail, and the program permits even obscure inputs tenuously linked with the current surroundings and situations. The hero (who can be renamed by the player) walks around each screen and can interact fully with the objects and creatures he comes across: he may walk behind rocks, open doors, climb trees and wade through swamps in an impressively realistic fashion.

Most of the screen is taken up by graphics of the locations and events. Roger's movements are controlled via keyboard, joystick or mouse, and the speed of events may be altered by the player at any

Face to face with the nefarious Sludge Vohaul – Atari ST screen



A relatively safe landing ensures that our hero may continue on his quest



PRESS ANY KEY

time (this feature is very important at points).

Below the graphics window is a single line for text input. The parser is surprisingly comprehensive, considering the amount of graphics, sound and animation the program has to deal with. Each location has to be loaded from the disk, but the results are well worth the short wait.

I played *Space Quest II* for about five hours, enjoyed every minute of it and wanted more. The game is vast, and the creature in the swamp prevented my progress, but when the pressure of deadlines has faded a little I will return to this adventure and attempt to thwart the plans of Sludge Vohaul.

ATMOSPHERE 93%
INTERACTION 96%
OVERALL 95%

SHADOWGATE

Mindscape/Mirrorsoft
AMIGA Diskette: £29.95

From the award-winning creators of *Deja Vu* and *Uninvited* comes another icon-driven interactive graphic adventure. Icom Simulations Inc, Mindscape and Mirrorsoft once again join forces to bring the game-playing public another masterpiece of cursor-clicking questing.

Shadowgate, once a shining fortress forged in the era of freedom and sunlight, now stands all but forgotten, a cold mouldering ruin. It is into this desolate and evil place that you, the last of an ancient line of kings, must venture. And it is in Shadowgate that you must confront the evil warlock lord and confound his dread purpose: to raise the titan Behemoth from its rest and bring about the destruction of your homeland.

The adventure opens at the door of Shadowgate, and the first problem is discovering how to get into the place. Once you're inside, the puzzles and instant deaths come thick and fast although the recurring problem is maintaining a light source for yourself – moving around in the dark is detrimental to one's health. Fortunately there are ample torches lying around in the first few locations.

Shadowgate is very attractive to look at and interesting to listen to, if a little embarrassing – the whole office can hear when you've died for the fifth time in an hour. And indeed there are too many instant deaths. Almost every location contains a deadly trap which can mean starting the game .

True, some of these traps can be avoided with a little logical thinking, but most are hit and miss, even bordering on the unfair. Helpfully, there's a save facility, but those regular deaths are tedious.

WORD POWER

The screen layout is very neat. Top left is a graphic of the current location and visible objects; top right is the command box, which includes words like EXAMINE, OPEN, SPEAK and OPERATE.

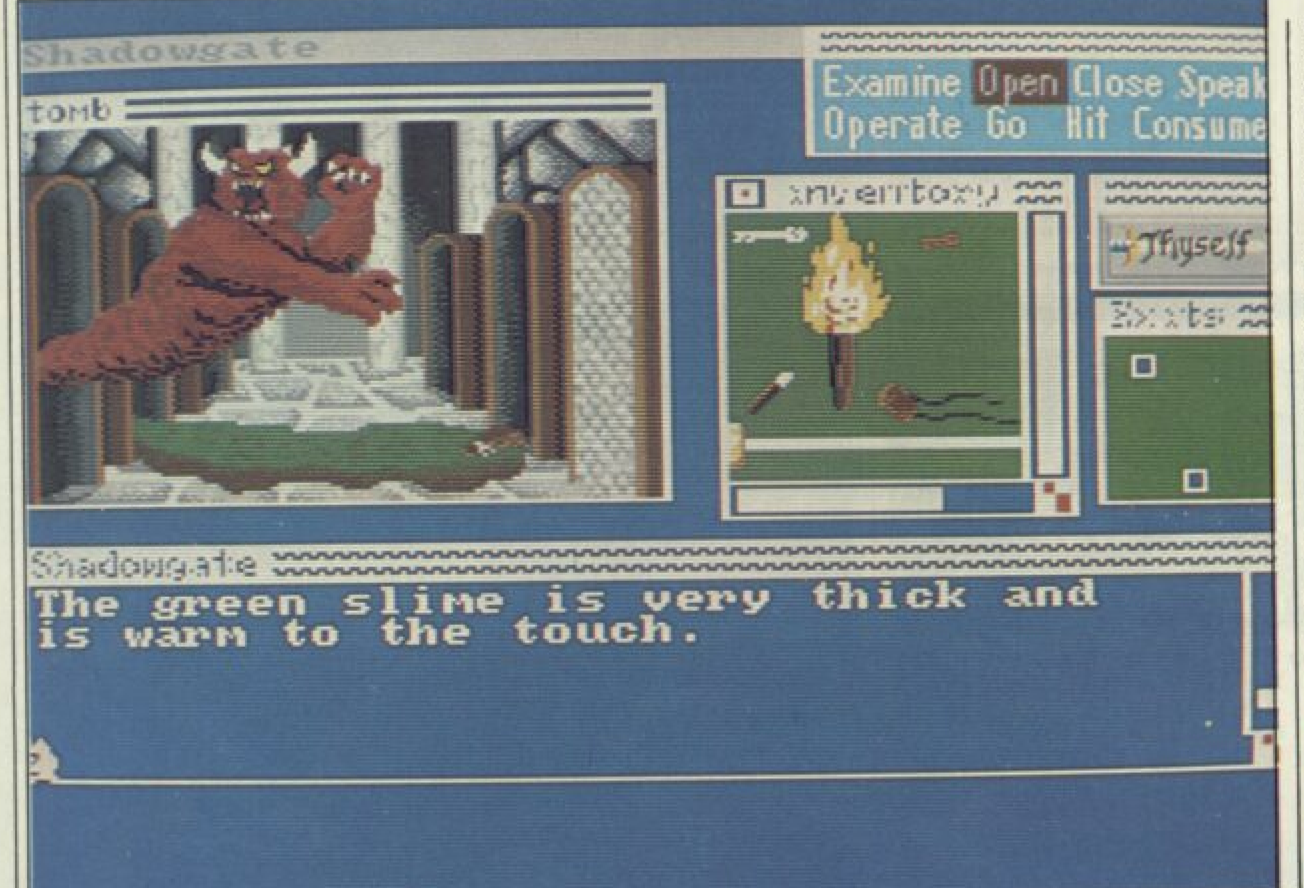
OPERATE is interesting – coupled with OPEN it encompasses almost everything one can do with objects or creatures found in *Shadowgate*. For example, keys need to be OPERATEd on doors to unlock them, and you must OPEN creatures to discover what they're carrying.

Moveable items displayed in the location window can be dragged into the player's inventory window (situated below the command box) as long as they're not too heavy and the player isn't already overloaded.

To the right of the inventory is the exit window which displays all possible ways out of the current location. And at the bottom of the screen is the text window, with messages concerning locations and events.

Commands are input via the mouse by moving the cursor and clicking on the desired command, such as EXAMINE, and then on the chosen object. In some cases double-clicking on the object alone will do the trick – the program understands that if you double-click on a closed door you probably want it opened. This also works with EXAMINEing some objects, CLOSEing opened containers or doors and GOing through exits.





Shadowgate is enthralling, exciting, interesting and extremely frustrating. In one location, with several closed coffins, the atmosphere is so strong that opening each coffin becomes literally a test of nerves – you know that death may lurk inside any of the caskets.

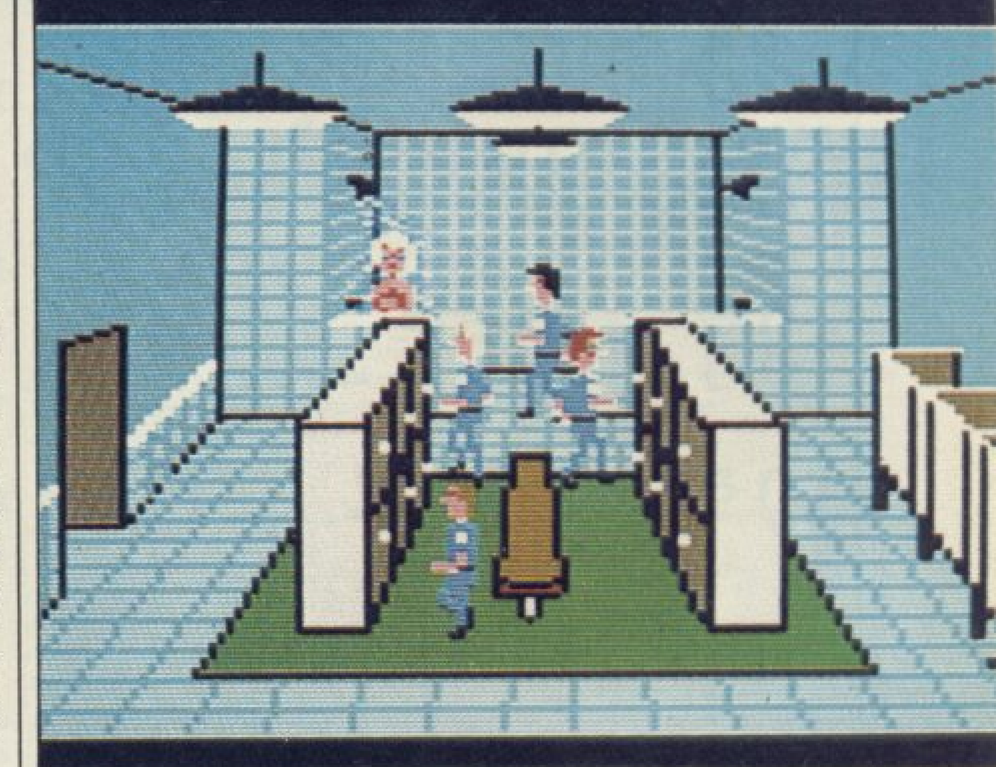
An adventure which can evoke that kind of emotion within the player has to be a winner, regardless of how many instant deaths one meets. *Shadowgate* stands proudly beside it's successful predecessors, *Deja Vu* and *Uninvited*, perhaps even a couple of inches taller.

ATMOSPHERE 87%
INTERACTION 86%
OVERALL 87%

POLICE QUEST

Sierra On-line Inc
ATARI ST Diskette: £19.99
AMIGA Diskette: £19.99
IBM PC Diskette: £19.99

In 1984 Sierra launched its innovative *King's Quest*, the '3-D animated adventure game'. It was the first American program in which the main character could be manoeuvred through the graphics in a three-dimensional perspective. He could travel from one screen to the next, and in and out of objects; if the player typed BOW TO KING the character would carry out the command. *King's Quest* was typical of this software house's creative thinking. Sierra began programming when the home-computer industry was fairly young and intends to remain an imaginative force in the adventure world with releases like *Police Quest* and *Space Quest II*, all the way through to the inevitable introduction of interactive video disks.



A clean cop is a happy cop

Lytton's police department is responsible for keeping the peace in the small community, and protecting its people and their property from crime. Officers must perform in a professional manner at all times; they must be overflowing with common sense, organisation, neatness, loyalty, guts, honesty and self-control. Uniforms must be clean, shoes shiny, socks matching, holes and patches invisible.

So it's not every adventurer who can be one of these 'blue knights' and tackle Lytton's growing crime problem: an evil mastermind, dubbed Death Angel by the media, is creating havoc in the community, trafficking drugs, planning robberies and murders and generally making the streets unsafe for Joe Public.

It's up to the player to prove that he's a good enough cop to go undercover, weed out Death Angel's gang and bring the racketeer to justice. Make one mistake, lose a suspect or make an arrest that won't hold up in court and your chance to get this master criminal will be lost forever – or at least until the game starts again.

ON PATROL

Humour is everywhere in *Police Quest*, and it hits my funny bone right on the chuckle button – as with *Space Quest II* I had trouble typing commands in my fits of laughter.

But there's a real adventure too. *Police Quest* includes more than 100 city streets to explore using the patrol car. The idea is to drive to various locations (a map is provided with the packaging) and at each one walk from screen to screen. The car can also be used for high-speed pursuits.

Sierra adventures are biased toward graphics rather than text descriptions – and most of the *Police Quest* display is the action window. The player is a little figure who walks around the many screens interacting realistically with people and objects.

Control of the main character is via keyboard, joystick or mouse, and the speed can be altered at any time.

As with all Sierra's recent adventures, the parser can deal with most likely inputs, and interaction is very good. The car is tricky to control at first and the sound lets the game down slightly, but *Police Quest* is a large adventure with more than one solution and should keep even hardened text-only-adventure-players amused and involved for quite some time.

ATMOSPHERE 89%
INTERACTION 93%
OVERALL 92%



PAW RELATIONS?



Most budget adventures are written with a utility such as Incentive's Graphic Adventure Creator **or Gilsoft's** Professional Adventure Writer**, so they're usually very similar and often full of glaring mistakes and omissions. But there's still quite a following for 8-bit budget adventures, and indeed every so often a good one appears.**

This is the first of what I hope will be many glimpses into the twilight zone of budgets. Remember that the overall percentage given at the end of each review takes into account the low price.

REALITY HACKER

Visual Dimensions
SPECTRUM Cassette: £2.99

A two-part adventure, *Reality Hacker* concerns a teenage boy called Tim who tries to break into a bank's computer system and add a few noughts to his personal account.

Part one is the quest to find the Reality Inc building and steal codes vital for hacking into the system. Tim – the player – must wait until his domineering Granny has gone to sleep and sneak out of the house. And once he's in the village he must avoid his parents, who are busy painting the town red, and get safely back to the house before them.

Part two (loaded separately) involves the actual hacking and is slightly different from a conventional adventure – it incorporates menus and most input is telephone numbers and codes. Both parts have a time limit.

Reality Hacker was written with *PAW*, the best commercial adventure-creator money can buy. But there are some glitches, such as a 24-hour computer shop which 'luckily is open all night', the very obscure 'use the boomerang to get the key' puzzle, and some illogical directional moves (going north from a particular location does not necessarily allow a move south to return).

And the program behaves very oddly, crashing and flashing at regular intervals and informing you that previously accepted inputs were invalid. I lost interest quite quickly and loaded up another Visual Dimensions game . . .

OVERALL 56%

HRH/CUDDLES

Powerplay
SPECTRUM Cassette: £2.99

Perhaps the less said about these two the better.

In *HRH* the player has mistakenly been sent the Queen's giro cheque – but luckily he's a bit of a patriot and decides to deliver it to Her Majesty in person.

The player comes across Prince William, Lady Diana, Prince Charles and most other members of the Royal Family; each one is placed in a ridiculous situation or at least made to look stupid, and this cheap *Spitting Image*-type humour grates painfully.

There's no sense of adventure in *HRH* and turning the computer off was a great delight – or rather it would have been if I hadn't had to load *Cuddles* from the other side of the cassette and play *it*.

Cuddles puts the player in the booties of an obnoxious baby whose sole aim in life is to find a new arm for his teddy bear (clearly he believes in the right to bear arms).

This game is decidedly not funny and is full of mistakes – it confuses 'brooch' and 'broach', for example. And even when the baby has thrown his nanny's brooch on the floor he can be scratched on the face by it.

Cuddles has no realism – the baby cannot scream, cry, eat food or do any of those annoying little things babies do. And there's no challenge; the player needs to 'guess the word' to get out of certain locations and is given no scope to experiment with people or objects he comes across. Yet another utility-written adventure goes to potty . . .

OVERALL 23%

A HARVESTING MOON/FAERIE

Powerplay
SPECTRUM Cassette: £2.99

Culture can be a dangerous thing. In *A Harvesting Moon* the player and his parents are visiting Moreton Manor, an old country house situated in spacious grounds amid rolling woodlands, when an enthusiastic warden closes a portcullis too quickly and cuts you off from your family.

Your task is to explore the house, find a way back to Mom and Dad and stop a strange psychic disturbance spreading.

The first problem with *A Harvesting Moon* is that many objects in it can't be EXAMINEd. Things placed around the game suggest they should be looked at more closely – the pavilion in the middle of the maze, the litter bins and the scarecrow, for example – but no extra information is given (except that the scarecrow is made of straw) after an EXAMINE attempt.

This means a lot of guesswork on the player's part as he tries to figure out what the writer wants him to do with these elements; and because the parser is so small it's no fun. The graphics are typical 'add nothing to the game' material, and the whole adventure is rather on the silly side.

Life without my fictitious parents soon took precedence over finding them again as the screen went blank.

On the reverse side of the cassette is a very old adventure called *Faerie*. This is full of magic, mystery and frustration and deserves to be given away free . . .

OVERALL 53%

A HOLIDAY TO REMEMBER

Visual Dimensions
SPECTRUM Cassette: £2.99

The hero's name in *A Holiday To Remember* is Malcolm Wright-Nutter – but I resisted the temptation to leave such a game on the shelf for the rest of its natural, and plunged in.

It transpires that Malcolm's less-than-normal uncle has invited him to visit, but when the young Wright-Nutter arrives his uncle's house has been destroyed and there is no sign of the eccentric relation. Malcolm's mission is to find out what has happened and why.

A Holiday To Remember has been put together quite well; there are no grammatical errors or spelling mistakes, and the graphics are bearable, though the choice of paper and ink colours is a little glaring. The only serious problem is typical of home-grown adventures: the lack of reality,

I can accept the plot quite happily – it's the ingredients, such as carrying around a Gatling gun (used by the gardener to shoot moles) and finding a mine cart in a tunnel with no trace of a track, which jar. One particular location west of the house makes a big deal of mentioning that the player can go no further west because of a high wall which is covered by an ivy plant, but the parser does not understand wall, ivy, climb or plant . . . what's the point of emphasising certain items if they have no bearing on the game?

And *A Holiday To Remember* is supposed to be a two-parter but part two wouldn't load for me. Still, despite some irritations the game is worth considering at its low price.

OVERALL 59%

FLASHBACK

Visual Dimensions
AMSTRAD Cassette: £3.99

Flashback was written using *GAC* and gives the player a race against time to save an 18th-century mansion from the bulldozer.

You have just 24 hours to raise money and pay for essential repairs to Major Catastrophe's mansion. And during this three-part adventure you'll find yourself journeying through time, picking up items and information to help with the problem of the dilapidated pile.

Part one is a general introduction to Major Catastrophe, his house and the surroundings; part two is a trip back to the First World War, behind enemy lines; and part three takes place in the Egyptian desert, where the player must escape from a German POW camp.

But like so many utility-created programs *Flashback* is bugged. Some EXAMINE inputs are replied to with 'OK' and nothing more, which is intensely annoying. And within the first few locations I found a ball of string in the mansion – and after trying to do various things with it discovered the program doesn't understand the words 'ball' or 'string' . . . odd.

It was then that I discovered the refrigerator and the error message that appears when one inputs EXAMINE IT ('it' referring to the fridge). And that was enough.

If Visual Dimensions can iron out the bugs, the three parts of *Flashback* should be worth the dosh. But I couldn't get far enough into this flawed version to give it a percentage.

TAKE TO THE SKIES!

FIVE DAYS OF GLIDING LESSONS ON OFFER FROM ARCANA

PLUS 10 MULTI-LINGUAL COPIES OF POWERPLAY

ARCANA COMPETITION CROSSWORD CLUES

ACROSS

5 An Indian religion (5)

8 Sue–Ellen's underwear (8)

9 Well dressed and clever (5)

10 One who breaks the law (8)

11 Dark hardwood (5)

14 Done on the Piste (3)

16 Mexican spice (6)

17 Liquid rock (6)

18 Disc trekkin' (3)

20 Tasty sea creature (5)

24 Religious orator (8)

25 One with the Abbey Habit (5)

26 Arcana's next game (4,4)

27 Between red and green (5)

DOWN

1 Tells the time to beat it (5)

2 Appears in *Powerplay* on Mt Olympus (5)

3 Forever in blue jeans (5)

4 Jill, say hello before taking control (6)

6 I am shortly incapable of movement (8)

7 Danger Ed disturbed in the head (8)

12 Angels messed up in the crime hub (8)

13 On top for whales? (8)

14 Mister after Knighthood (3)

15 Little devil? (3)

19 An American girl on the continent (6)

21 Stop! Shortly on video (5)

22 Disorder in the middle of the Cha Cha oscillations (5)

23 Push the media hard (5)

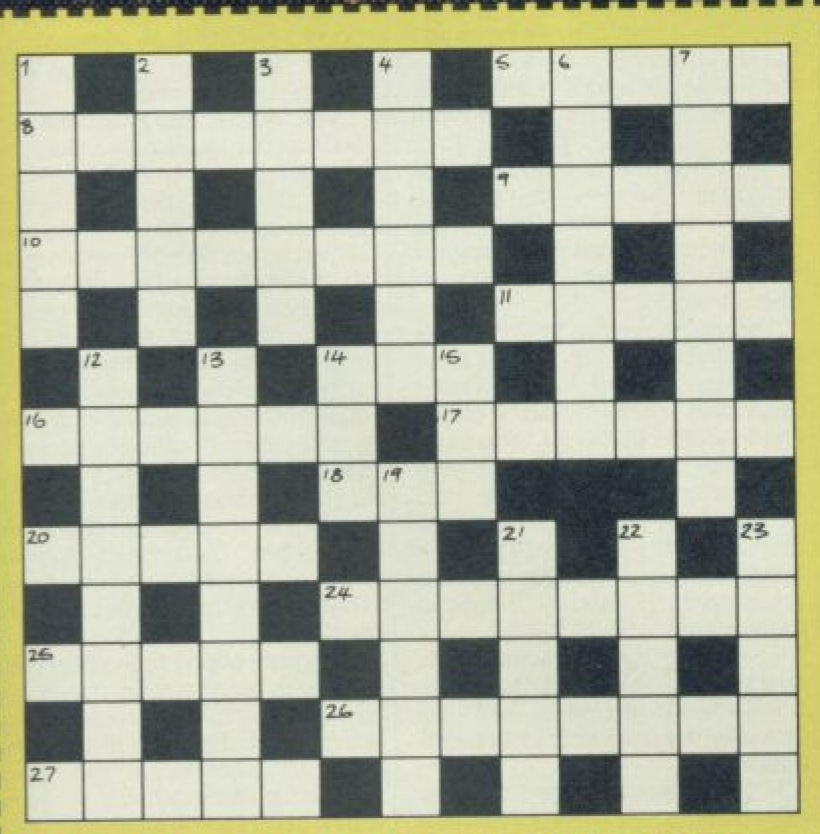
Arcana's Max Taylor recently visited the TGM offices and very kindly offered to give away an amazing competition prize to celebrate their two forthcoming releases, *Marscops* and *Powerplay*. Why? Because he thinks our magazine and it's readers deserve only the best!

And what is the prize? Well, it's a full five days of gliding lessons. This week of thrills (but hopefully no spills) will take place in April when the Gliding season starts, and includes food (which must be kept down at all times) and accomodation. However, before the course ensues, the winner will first be given a trial flight in a glider just to make sure there are no problems with vertigo, air sickness or fear of dying. If everything works out OK, they'll be packed off to their local gliding club for five days intensive training. It doesn't end there however – once the five days are over the winner will be offered a whole years membership to his/her local club!

Arcana are also giving away to ten lucky runners-up a very rare copy of *Powerplay* (**Atari ST and Amiga formats only, please state clearly which machine you own**) which incorporate multi-lingual questions. These versions are not available in the UK, so not only will you be the proud owner of a collectors item, you'll also be able to brush up on your German whilst playing a very good game.

All you have to do to gain a chance of winning one of these prizes is correctly complete the crossword below and, as a tie breaker, think up an interesting, witty and even amusing question for *Powerplay*. The winning entry will be chosen by the Editor. Photocopies of the crossword are perfectly acceptable should you not wish to deface your copy of TGM. Entrants under the age of 18 will require their parents consent to take advantage of the first prize. There'll be no solo flights during the five day course, and no person under the age of 16 is allowed to fly solo.

Please send your entries to **ARCANA COMPETITION, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE, SY8 1DB** to arrive before March 17. Our standard competition rules apply – if in doubt check out the masthead.



MY QUESTION FOR ARCANA'S POWERPLAY IS:

....

....

....

....

NAME ....

ADDRESS ....

....

TYPE OF COMPUTER ....


Boba Fett, the most notorious bounty hunter in the galaxy, wears the garb of a Manddonian Commando – the shock troops wiped out by the Jedi Knights in the Clone wars

WEST E

John Woods leaves the dungeons to the dragons after RPG adventures in a galaxy far, far away – and a frightening future all too close

It's a mixed bag this month – **West End Games** have followed up their excellent second edition of *Paranoia* (reviewed last issue) with the *Star Wars* RPG. A disturbance in the Force tells me it will be another hit. And from **Games Workshop** there's *The Judge Dredd Companion* and the rather disappointing *Dungeonquest*.

An appeal to readers: what do *you* play? If there are particular games you'd like to see featured, write to me at THE GAMES MACHINE and let me know.

STAR WARS – THE ROLEPLAYING GAME THE STAR WARS SOURCEBOOK

Role-playing rules and background book
West End Games
Both hardback, 142pp each, £9.95 each

Do you long to be out there amongst the stars, flying an X-wing fighter, wielding a light sabre, heroically battling for truth, honour, freedom and ridiculous hairstyles throughout the galaxy? If so, West End Games have just the thing for you – here at last, a mere 11 years after the first movie, is the *Star Wars* RPG, and it's a beauty.

Take the role of a minor Jedi, smuggler, Wookie or bounty-hunter and fight with the resistance against Imperial tyranny in true starbuckling space-opera style!

The rules system is unlike any I've seen before. The first surprise is the character-generation procedure – no dice rolls! A player chooses one of the 24 'character templates' provided – ranging from everyday smugglers and pirates through various types of alien to Jedi – and this specifies the character's starting abilities, equipment and general background.

The player then customises his character, allocating limited points to improve chosen skills. And then the adventurer is ready to leap into action.

It's a very neat system – the only drawback is the limited selection of character templates. But these do cover most of the likely heroes and heroines of a *Star Wars* adventure, and if your choice isn't provided it's easy to design a new template to suit. And *The Star Wars Sourcebook* extends the choice with stats for several new aliens.

The strongest feature of the system is the rules for using character skills. Each ability or skill a character can use is given a dice code – '3D+1', for instance. You start with dice codes given on the character template, and they can be improved by successful completion of an adventure.

To attempt to use a skill, the player rolls the number of six-sided dice indicated by the code (three, in the example), adds any extra amount (in this case, one) to the score, and hopes to have scored higher than a 'difficulty number' specified by the gamemaster.

Difficulty numbers range from as low as five for a very easy task (firing a blaster at point-blank range, or turning a corner in a Landspeeder at moderate speed) up to perhaps 30 for the near-impossible (firing a blaster at long range at a storm-trooper in deep cover, or hitting an exhaust port while flying your fighter at great speed down a trench).

Various factors affect the dice code as play goes on – a wounded character loses one dice roll, and attempting to perform several actions at once reduces the code for each by a number of rolls equal to the number of extra actions. This system is extremely easy to use in play, both for the players and for the GM – there are no lengthy discussions about interpretation to slow things down – and yet has sufficient scope to handle almost anything.

The combat system has an elegant simplicity, too: characters are either unharmed, stunned, wounded or incapacitated. There's no fiddling around with hit points.

The philosophy of the *Star Wars* game is that player characters should behave heroically and stand a good chance of surviving, and to encourage this each character starts out with a 'Force point'. This can be used at a critical moment in an adventure, and represents 'trusting to the Force'. For the duration of the round in which the point is used, all the character's skill codes are doubled.

So the Force point means Han Solo really *can* dodge the fire of 20 storm-troopers as he runs for the escape hatch, and gives players the chance to pull off some impressive stunts – doubled skill codes make it easy to perform many skills at once.

ND STRIKE BACK

The rulebook opens with a short section for the players; 14 pages are all you need read to get started, and they include a short solo adventure to introduce the basic game concepts. The bulk of the book is taken up by the GM's section, which details the rules system and provides oodles of hints and tips on setting up adventures, a little background and a short introductory scenario to get your players started.

The book is rounded off by a reference section with charts, tables and character templates, and the whole is livened up by some entertaining glossy colour artwork – including a recruitment poster for the Imperial Navy!

But the background detail in the rulebook itself is sketchy – data on a few standard types of starship and some common aliens is about all. If you want to run adventures in an accurately-detailed recreation of the *Star Wars* universe you'll really need the extra material in *The Star Wars Sourcebook*, which is packed with information on droids, weapons, aliens, starships and the like, price lists and plans for a rebel base and an Imperial garrison.

Even with the *Sourcebook*, though, you'll have to improvise a lot to recreate the universe of the movies. Most notably, there are no star maps or even remotely comprehensive lists of planets.

Still, West End Games's *Star Wars* set is the best system to date for fairly light-hearted space-opera role-playing. The rules are beautifully simple, and with only minor changes could suit almost any science-fiction universe. And though the books are a little pricey, the simplicity of the rules means only the GM really need have a copy.

Presentation is excellent – though it's annoying that neither book has an index – and if the two books, now imported from the States, were ever printed in the UK the prices would probably come down.

On the whole, the rulebook is excellent whether you want to play in the *Star Wars* universe itself or use it as the base of your own system. The *Sourcebook* is something of a luxury, but still worthwhile.

The force is with John Woods as, light sabre in hand, he delves deeply into the Star Wars **role playing books, bravely enters *Dragonquest* to do battle with an old flame and examines *Judge Anderson* . . .**

DUNGEONQUEST

Board game, 1-4 players
Games Workshop £14.99

Dare you enter the eerie ruins of Dragonfire Castle? Dare you brave traps, monsters and bottomless pits and finally face the legendary dragon itself in your quest for treasure? Dare you risk playing *Dungeonquest*? I'm afraid your problem won't be so much trying not to wake the dragon up as keeping awake yourself long enough to reach it . . .

Dungeonquest is the successor to Games Workshop's popular fantasy board game *Talisman*. One to four players (yes, the game can be played solo) each take control of a single brave hero (all men, of course – equal rights for



female adventurers, I say!) and venture into the uncharted ruins of a long-hidden dungeon in search of treasure. A compelling scenario indeed . . .

But despite the corny dungeon-bashing setting, *Dungeonquest* gives a very favourable first impression. The components are high-quality and plentiful – there are glossy and atmospherically-illustrated counters and cards, and an easy-to-follow rulebook with a sensible pull-out reference section.

Prettiest of all are the 115 'room tiles', each of which illustrates a single section of the dungeon. The map is built up from them as the game goes on – so the dungeon is literally uncharted when play begins, and every game is different.

After some minimal setting-up formalities, play proceeds briskly. Each player on his turn takes a room tile and places it on any square of the board which is adjacent to his current position. The square – a room – may be harmless, but may hold a trap or a monster. And once the effects of any mishap have been resolved, play moves on to the next adventurer.

With luck and nerve, a player may reach the central part of the map where the dragon's chamber holds riches beyond belief. But woe betide he who wakes the slumbering beast!

The winner is the player whose character escapes with the most treasure before sunset, at which point anyone left in the dungeon is in for a fate worse than death. This imposes a strict time limit – there's only just enough time to reach the centre and return, so there can be some exciting finishes to *Dungeonquest*. (A typical game lasts an hour or so, but the fewer players the shorter it will be.)

The dungeon's hazards range from the lethal (a bottomless pit) to the merely irritating (vampire bats). Most of these help to slowly grind down an adventurer by reducing his life points – and once they're all lost, that's it.

Monsters roam the dungeon and must be avoided or defeated in combat, the latter being resolved by a combat-chit system similar to (but much more elementary than) that in Games Workshop's *Fury Of Dracula*. Most frustrating of all are cards such as 'Cave In' – not fatal in themselves, but likely to delay your hero by precious turns.

Sounds fun? Well, it is for a while, and the excellent physical components make building up the plan of the dungeon satisfying in itself. And *Dungeonquest* seems interesting because there are usually several courses of action to choose from. But things soon begin to pall.

There is virtually no scope for player skill in *Dungeonquest*. A vaguely sensible strategy is essential, but apart from that your hero succeeds or fails by the turn of a card or roll of a die, and there's very little you can do to affect the outcome.

And when you reach the dragon's chamber, the values of the treasure you can find vary so much that one player might draw a single item that beats four or more held by another. *Dungeonquest*'s designers appear to have put a lot of effort into making a huge variety of events possible during play, but the randomness of life in these dungeons means there's no compulsion to play after the novelty has worn off.

Dungeonquest will doubtless appeal to the lower end of the RPG market's age range, and it's certainly good fun for a while – a light-hearted way to round off an evening's role-playing, perhaps. But a simple game doesn't have to be mindless, and *Dungeonquest* is more complex than a good many simple games (*Monopoly* even!); so it's a pity such an attractively-produced package doesn't have more lasting appeal.

THE JUDGE DREDD COMPANION

Role-playing supplement
Games Workshop
Hardback 120pp, £9.99

So you think you're pretty good, eh, Judge? You've handled everything the millions of perps on the streets of Mega-City One can throw at you, and emerged still tough, fair and scowling happily? Well, them punks from Brit-Cit, the Games Workshop gang, have cooked up a surprise or two for you here! New skills for you to master (or for the perps to use against you), new opponents to face and page after page of the toughest crime-fighting around. Don't let your Lawgiver leave your hand . . .

Games Workshop's *Judge Dredd – The Role-Playing Game* is a rare and wondrous creature – a truly original and high-quality British RPG. Based in the world created by *2000AD*'s serious cartoon story, it casts the players as Judges – each Judge is law-enforcer, jury and executioner rolled into one in the grim and violent Mega-City of the future.

And now Games Workshop have given their brainchild a little more of the attention it deserves with *The Judge Dredd Companion*.

As a Judge in the game, your arduous years of training (starting at age five!) have earned you the right to pursue Mega-City One's criminals with a vast array of exciting equipment and weapons – the computer-guided Lawgiver handgun and the heavily-armed and armoured Lawmaster motorbike are the best-known. You can also do lots of good bits of shouting: 'Drok it!!! Hold it right there, perp, or you'll need both hands to get your legs home!'.

The game system is excellently suited to this fairly light-hearted and high-action theme; it's simple in play but includes plenty of details, allowing you to recreate all the equipment and skills available to Judges and all the criminals and natural hazards they must overcome.

All in all, the *Judge Dredd* RPG has deserved its recent popularity. But it's suffered slightly from a scarcity of follow-up material – partly, perhaps, because the two rulebooks in the boxed set *are* so comprehensive. And there haven't been many scenarios, though *Judgement Day* was good.

So *The Judge Dredd Companion* is welcome. It's attractively packaged, with lots of inspiring illustrations from *2000AD* and a striking (if rather unflattering) picture of luvverly luvverly Judge Anderson on the cover. Player hand-outs are thoughtfully consigned to a separate pull-out section, saving the referee the trouble of photocopying.

And the contents are very varied – there are some official new rules, miscellaneous background details, an introductory solo adventure for new players, and some encounter-style adventures ('code 14s').

There are also two full-fledged scenarios – *Channel 9 Crime Time Special* is a ten-page investigation ideal for beginning players and referees, and *Fear And Loathing In Mega-City One* is a 34-page monster from the pen of Richard Halliwell providing plenty of deadly fun for players and something for experienced GMs to get their teeth into.

These two major scenarios are the high spots of the book, and Downtown – a particularly perp-infested region of the Mega-City intended for inclusion in your own campaigns – is a close runner-up.

The new rules are less interesting – OK, some of the new Judge abilities are useful, but most good *Judge Dredd* GMs have long since learnt to improvise such skills. You have to when confronted with players who read *2000AD* – 'Of course a Lawmaster can clear 50 feet from a standing start! Look at this frame here . . . '

The best new rule adds the Exorcism Division, giving players a chance to play ghost-busting Judges. *Judge Dredd* purists will hate it!

Of the background material, a tourist guide to Brit-Cit (22nd-century Britain) provides a few laughs, and Pete Tamlyn's article on the Mega-City's more unusual crimes should give GMs some inspiration for scenarios. Oh, and there's a cut-out board game of the future sport 'block out' – seconds of fun for serious role-players.

All in all, there's a lot here that will please all *Judge Dredd* fans. The scenarios are excellent, and the shorter code 14s can be life-savers for GMs whose players wander off the beaten track or who polish off the perps after just ten minutes' play.

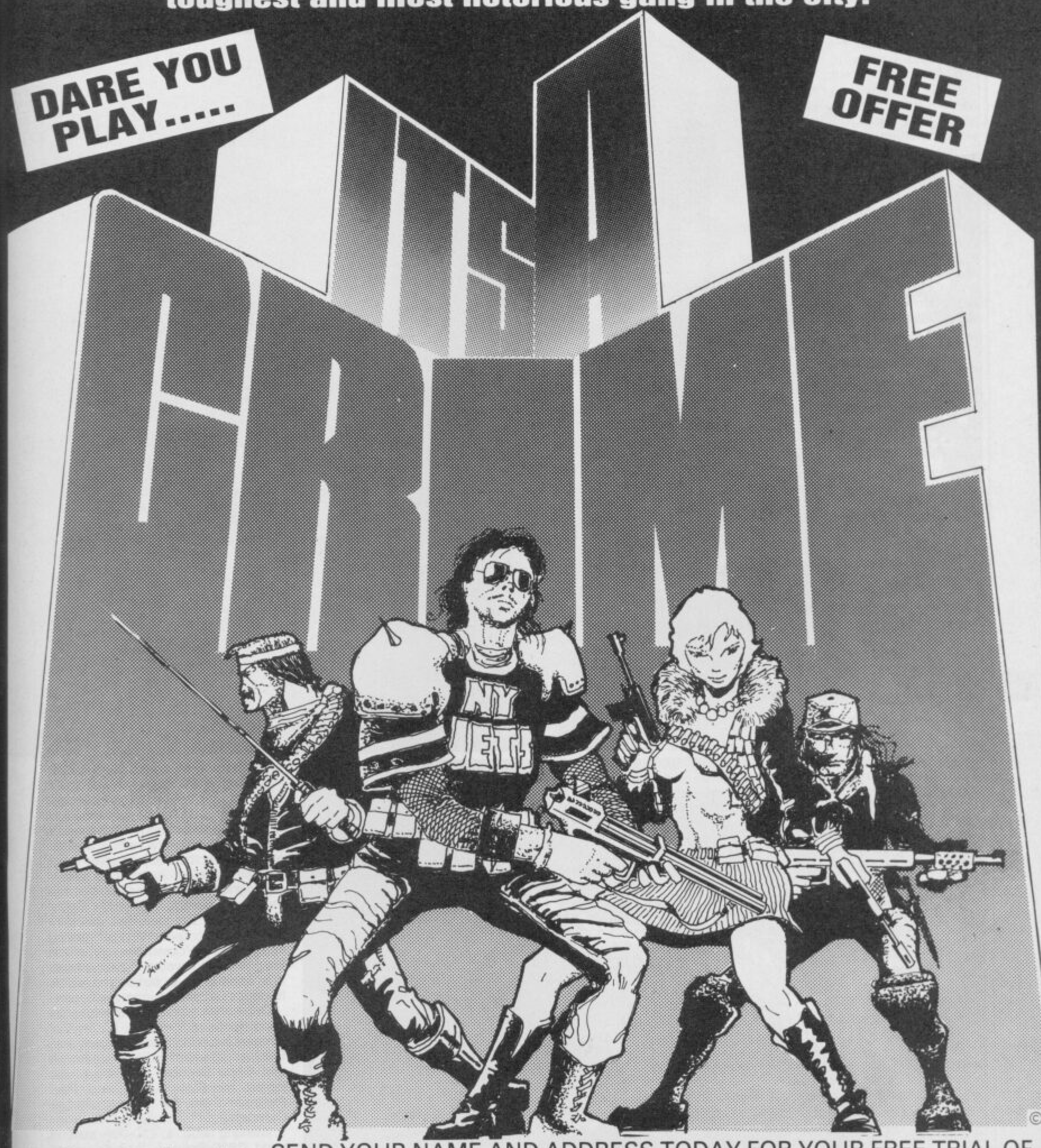
There's also a very welcome element of humour throughout, which is essential to a game of this sort – I particularly like the asylum in Downtown (The Barry Norman Home For The Terminally Sarky) and the Brit-Cit guide's William Blake Theme And Leisure Park ('spend up to 18 hours a day extracting simulated fossil fuel').

Keen *Judge Dredd*-players won't find all the material to their liking, but perhaps that's inevitable in a mixed collection like this. On the whole, *The Judge Dredd Companion* is recommended for any *Judge Dredd* GM's collection.



GET INTO CRIME!

In the late 1990's the streets of New York are a jungle. You are the ice cool leader of a gang of drug crazed terrorists. Your main goal is to become the richest, toughest and most notorious gang in the city.



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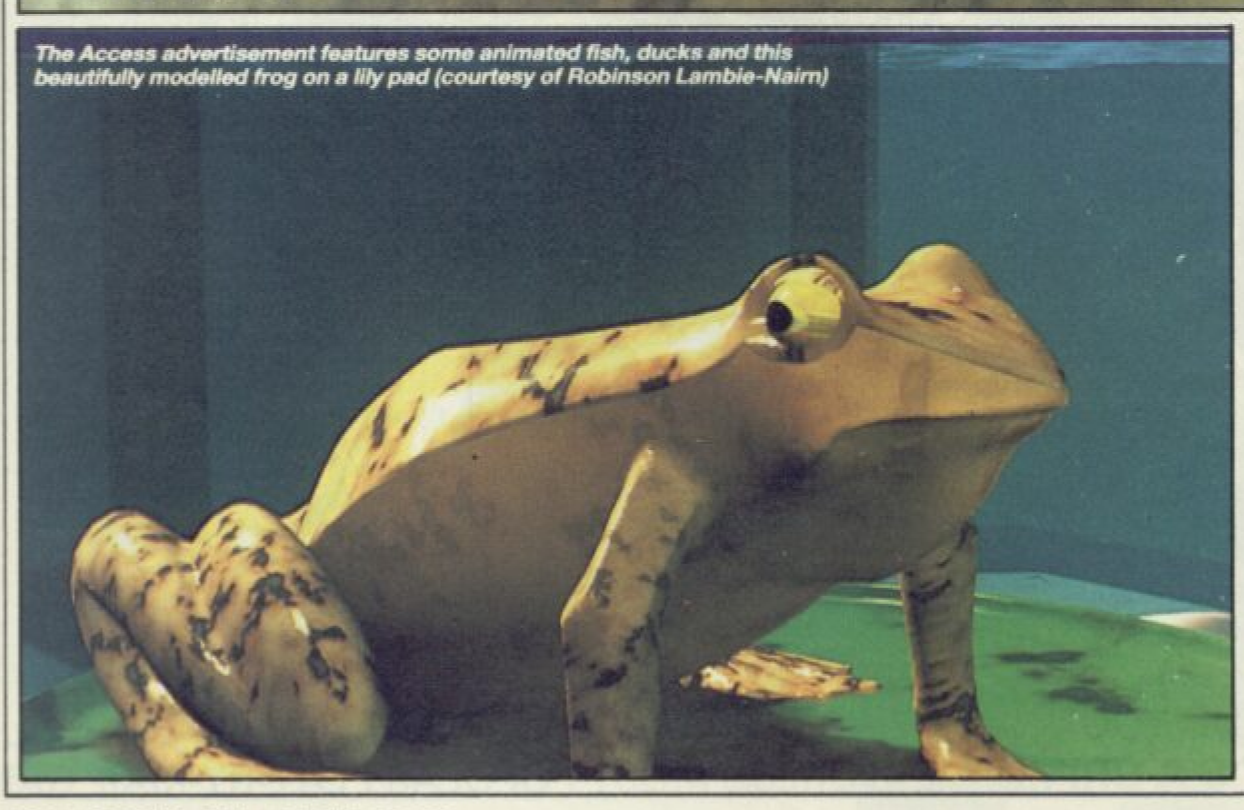
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DIGITAL PICTUR EXHIBI

Nik Wild, Steve Jarratt, and cameraman Cameron Pound paid a visit to the offices of leading computer graphics company Digital Pictures, and spoke to Chris Briscoe and Pete Florence, two of its founders.



The Access advertisement features some animated fish, ducks and this beautifully modelled frog on a lily pad (courtesy of Robinson Lambie-Nairn)

Imagine six chocolate Smarties racing across an obstacle course, negotiating a chocolate pool full of chocodiles (crocodiles made from Smartie tubes) and climbing a vertical snakes-and-ladders board complete with animate reptiles. Imagine all this in photographic detail, full colour and moving smoothly. Got it? Digital Pictures did. But then their stock-in-trade is the rendering of moving images by computer graphics; images which would be expensive, time consuming or simply impossible to create by conventional methods.

Originally based in the experimental department of the Slade College of Fine Art in London, the company was first instigated in 1982 by Paul Brown and Chris Briscoe, who were later joined by Steve Lowe and Pete Florence from the Moving Picture Company.

Working with a £30,000 second hand C330 Eclipse, their first work was released in the Spring of 1983 in the shape of an advertisement for

RES AT AN TION

Incredible depth is generated in these fractal mountains, by careful use of shading and colour

Michelin 'MX' tyres. Prepared using their new high resolution, solid-shaded animation rendering package, its amazing point-of-view shots actually moving from within the tread of the tyre to extreme wide angle shots were merely a taste of things to come.

Over the last five years, Digital Pictures have continually improved and expanded upon the number of staff, amount of equipment and the limitations of their visions, culminating in the Access and Yoplait Yogurt commercials, both of which have recently received awards (and the latter of which is soon to be screened in the UK – watch out for it).

Digital Pictures' latest project provides a series of animated maps to illustrate the four-part BBC documentary, 'The War in Korea'. Rather than rely on static or cel animated maps to show forces' manoeuvres, Digital Pictures were commissioned to produce a series of fractal landscapes complete with moving icons, seen from a constantly shifting viewpoint. The total footage lasts six minutes and took over six weeks to complete, due to the complexity and speed with which the fractal-based images are generated.

The rather lengthy process of creating high-quality computer generated imagery is now a well-oiled routine, optimised by Digital Pictures' structured and professional set-up at their West End headquarters. Once a client has decided to employ Digital Pictures' services, the sequence is designed with the aid of both a separate ad agency and with additional input during the course of the project itself. Production is quite interactive, with ideas and suggestions coming from all quarters.

For instance, the original concept for both the Smarties and Access commercials came from the Robinson Lambie-Nairn advertising agency. Digital Pictures then assessed the feasibilty of their individual elements and refined or altered the storyboard prior to the start of work. In the case of the Smarties commercial, special software was needed, designed by Simon Rooms, and Robinson Lambie-Nairn also provided the animation services of Ted Rockley who worked alongside the Digital Pictures Team of Sheila Dunn and Chris Briscoe.

At the moment, it takes roughly an hour's worth of mainframe time to complete a single frame of animation – over a day to produce a one second sequence!

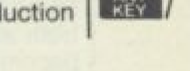
Once a storyboard is finalised, the basic images are plotted as wireframe graphics on one of two Silicon Graphics IRIS (Interactive Raster Imaging System) workstations. The 3031 and 2400 support eight and four megabyte memories respectively, and operate at around 0.25 mips (million instructions per second). The hardware isn't particularly impressive, but the dedicated vector software make the machines extremely powerful tools, enabling the real-time animation and design of sequences to be achieved quickly and with relative ease.

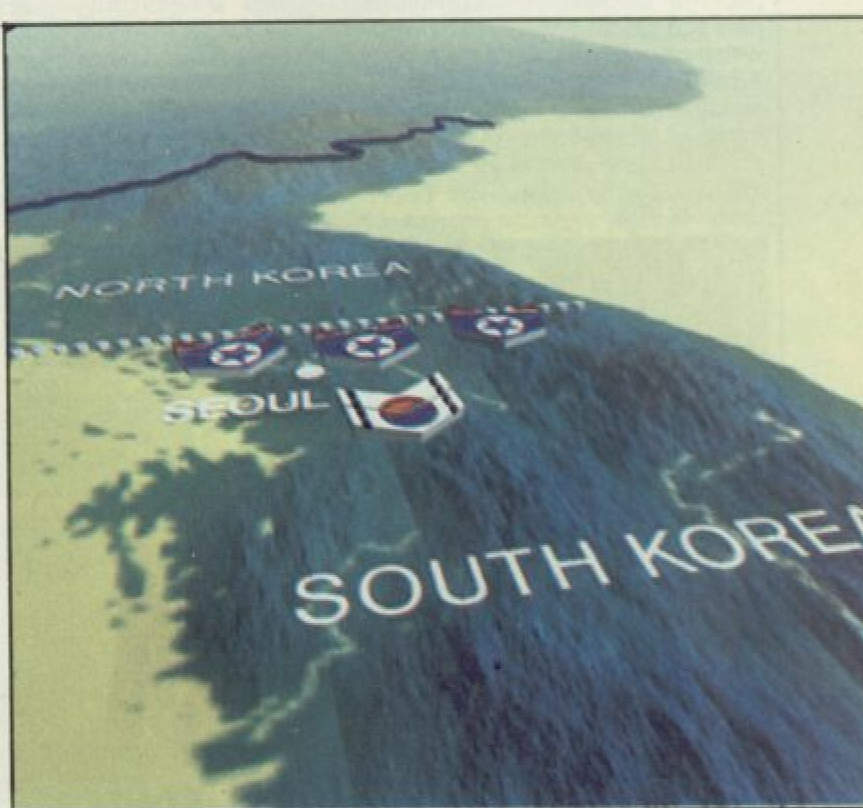
Mathematical models of three-dimensional objects are created by using arrangements of standard polygons, or by physically inputting spatial co-ordinates from drawings or solid models, which are commissioned elsewhere.

The completed animation script file is then ported over to one of the company's mainframes to be rendered solid in low resolution. The sequence may then be viewed and modified as required before the complex smoothing, texturing, and shading is begun.

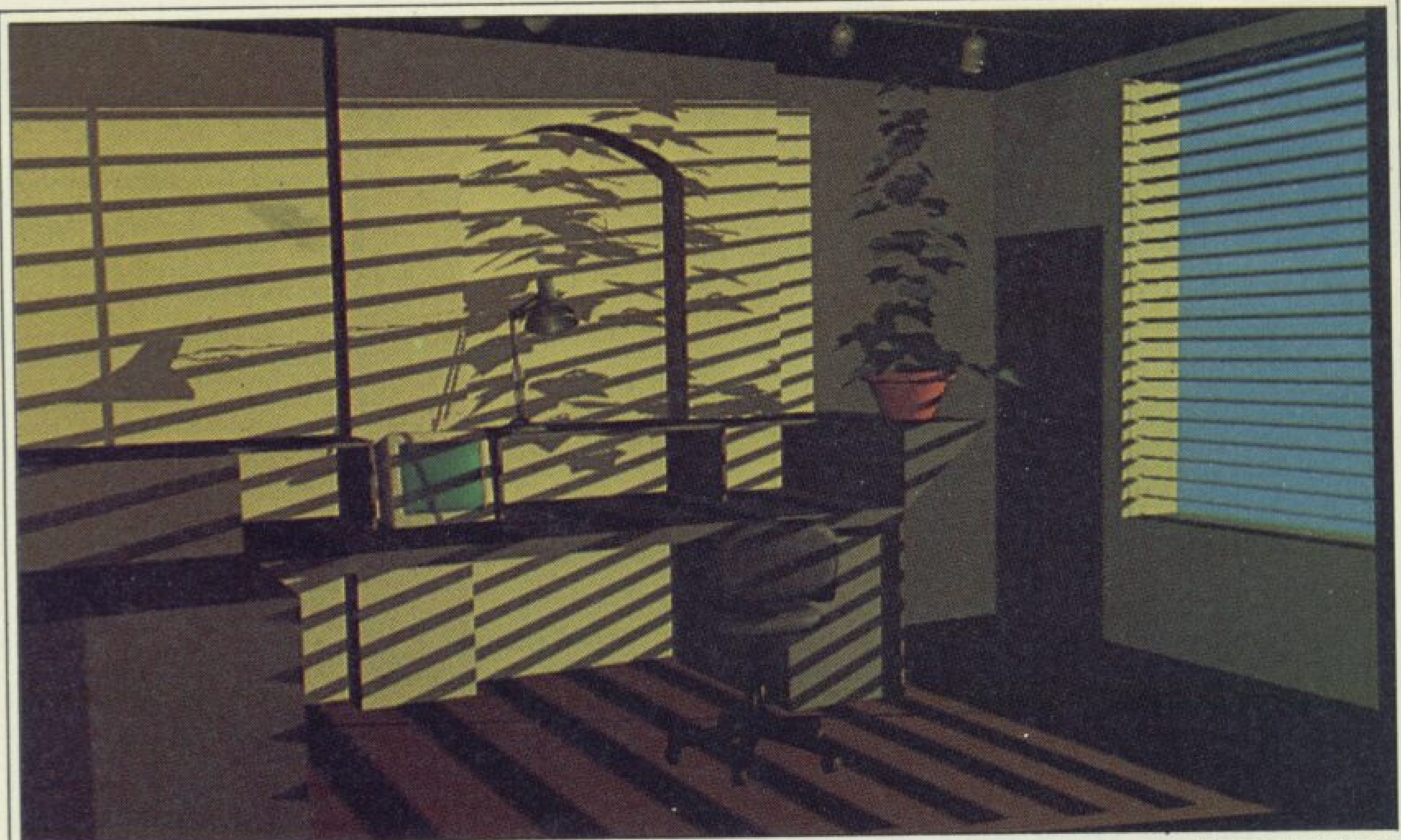
The body of this work is achieved by Digital Pictures' Data General MV 10000SX and MV 15000 mainframes. The 10000SX boasts a 24 Mb internal memory plus a special math board for trigonometric functions, while the 15000 has a 16 Mb memory, full floating point math functions and runs 30-40% faster than the 10000. Both machines have access to a 1.2 gigabyte hard disks on which finished frames may be stored prior to dropping down onto one-inch videotape or even 35mm pin-registered film stock.

For the last two years, Digital Pictures has been part of the Molinare Vision group of companies, which includes Molinare post production





One of the fractal maps used in the BBC documentary, 'The War in Korea'



graphics department, Visions post production and editing facility, and TSI Video. Thus, Digital Pictures has direct, on-line access to videotape editing facilities, Quantel Paintbox hardware, telecine plus film and video studios, providing a complete, compact, coordinated and self-sufficient environment in which to practice their art. Graphic sequences may be composited with pre-recorded material on film or videotape – anything from stock footage to traditional cel animation and captions – using sophisticated first generation digital techniques.

The current hardware at Digital Pictures tops the £1M mark, but as both subject matter and techniques become increasingly sophisticated, new equipment is required to keep up with production times. At the moment, it takes roughly an hour's worth of mainframe time to complete a single frame of animation – over a day to produce a one second sequence! The whole Smarties ad took over 7500 man-hours to prepare, from initial storyboarding through to the final cut and videotaping.

All the software programs currently used by Digital Pictures have been designed and written by members of the team. Their latest rendering package has improved 'anti-aliasing' (the averaging of several shades which appear within one pixel to create a harmonious and realistic edge to objects) and sophisticated texturing enabling the impression of many types of surfaces to be created and overlaid to build up a heavily textured surface.

They are also developing their fractal routines and experimenting with a 'morphing' package which allows the smooth transformation of one three-dimensional object into another, in true Disneyesque fashion.

Software is constantly being redesigned and upgraded, and new software is often created for specific projects and with an eye to future hardware. In fact, Digital pictures are currently evaluating the new breed of RISC machines (Reduced Instruction Set Computers), such as the Whitechapel 20 mips workstations, and are confident that with 10-15 of these machines, they could produce a full feature film within 12 to 18 months (the company have in fact been approached with regard to producing sequences for a prospective feature, but such projects are well and truly under wraps).

With the wealth of projects queueing up at their door, (including a new Central TV logo and animated sequences of atomic models for a forthcoming Horizons programme) Digital Pictures certainly fulfill their legend of being the 'leading edge'.

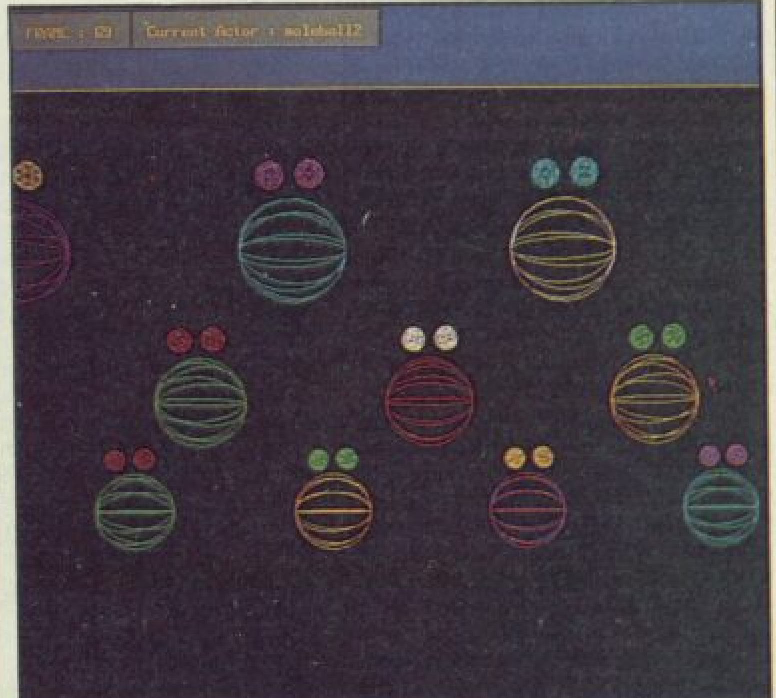
A superb static shot, using custom-written shadow software to generate the complex pattern of light and dark

The current hardware at Digital Pictures tops the £1M mark

The new opening sequence for 'Opportunity Knocks' combines cel-animated characters and computer generated backgrounds



Wire frame molecules created on the IRIS work station for use on a forthcoming BBC Horizon programme




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Now THE GAMES MACHINE is available monthly, don't you think it's time you subscribed to your favourite all-formats mag? It costs just £18 (mainland UK, £25 Europe) to have 12 issues delivered directly to your door – the usual ETA is a few days before the on-sale date. With the rapidity at which the newsagents sell out of TGM, can you afford to take the chance of missing out?

This month (as if you needed any further incentive to do the sensible thing) Spectrum, Commodore 64/128 and Amstrad CPC owners will receive a free copy of Ocean's amazing *Platoon*, which was awarded a massive 92% last issue. If you own an Atari ST or Amiga, don't despair – you can still have a copy of *Platoon* at a ridiculous give-away price: the Amiga version for only £6.95 (save £18), and the Atari ST version for a mere £4.95 (save £15)!

Platoon features six different sections of amazing depth and graphically stunning gameplay, taken from the anti-war film of the same name. As if the game isn't sufficient to entice you, also included in the packaging is an audio tape of the film's theme tune – Smokey Robinson and the Miracles' *Track of my Tears* – AND an A3 *Platoon* poster.

THE GAMES MACHINE is THE multi-format magazine which is designed to bring you the latest software reviews, news and previews for 8 and 16-bit computers as well as incorporating articles on a plethora of Hi-Tec innovations. TGM is the way forward, stick with us.

I want to subscribe to 12 issues of TGM at the price of £18 (mainland UK, post included), or £25 (Continental Europe and Overseas post included) and receive my free copy of *Platoon*. Please write in BLOCK CAPITALS!

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Payment must be made by cheque or postal order, payable to **Newsfield Limited**, or via credit card as below. Please tick the appropriate box:

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The copies of *Platoon* will be dispatched as soon as humanly possible after receipt of your order, but please allow up to 28 days for delivery. Atari ST and Amiga owners should be prepared to wait slightly longer due to development schedules. If you have any enquiries please ring (0584) 5851. Subscribers wishing their subscription to start with Issue Five should ensure their form arrives no later than February 24th. Any subscriptions received after that time will begin with Issue Six. This offer closes on March 30th.

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SHOOT TO KILL!

10 SEGA LIGHT PHASERS AND GAMES ON OFFER

Mastertronic are so impressed with their new Sega Light Phaser Kit, they've decided to give away 10 of them in this fabulous competition. Also included in the kit is the Combo Cartridge which features three great shooting games: *Marksman Shooting*, *Trap Shooting* and *Safari Hunt*. That's not all – Mastertronic are also offering 10 copies of the *Shooting Gallery* cartridge to keep you blasting away long into the night.

To be one of the lucky winners, simply find the five missing words from the sentences below in the word square. Mark them and post your entry form off to us here at: **LIGHT PHASER COMPETITION, THE GAMES MACHINE, PO BOX 10, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1DB**, to arrive no later than March 17th. Check out the masthead for full competition details.

1) The Mastertronic Group distribute the Master System
2) The Sega Light costs £44.95
3) After is a new addition to the Sega range
4) The package comes with the Cartridge
5) The gun connects to the Sega via the port

NAME ....

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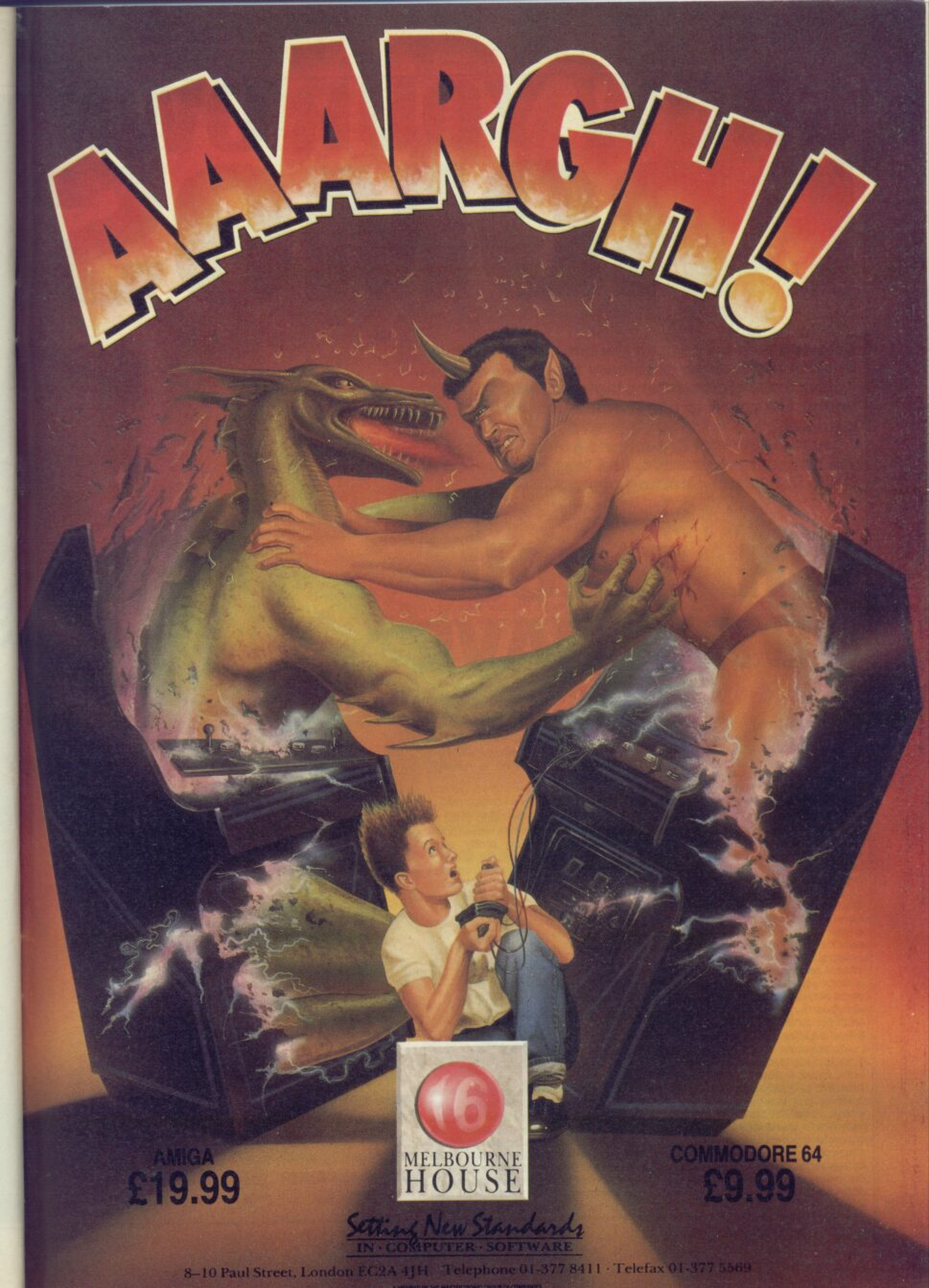
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GROW YOUR OWN PROMOS

Growing your own is half the fun – but you don't have to learn video hardware the hard way.

Live action, computer graphics and stunning sound are yours to use if you've got the right equipment.

Just follow Mel Croucher's guide to making your own video promos, and test your screen skills in a talent-spotting comp.

WHAT YOU GOTTA HAVE

I made my first video back in the dippy-hippy Sixties, and all agreed that it was a heap of excrement. I made all the usual mistakes – using gimmicks not because I *needed* to but because they were available, jumping in at the deep end without planning the production first, and being totally unoriginal. Some say that not much has changed since then . . . but anyway, here's what I've learned.

Whatever hardware you happen to have at home, you're going to need access to a compatible video recorder, and a cable or two for dubbing your audio track and visual images on to a master video tape.

Once you're happy with your audio track, write yourself a simple video storyboard (a series of sketches showing what you want onscreen) based on images you know you can produce easily: computer-generated graphics, home videos or a mixture of both. Break it down into a series of separate shots, and time each carefully.

You can't achieve studio techniques like dissolving from one scene to the next without specialist equipment; neither can you expect broadcast quality from domestic gear. But what you can achieve is originality, atmospherics, humour and stimulation. These are free.

The choice of video formats is wide, and will probably be determined by what you have in the house, what you can borrow, or what is cheaply available for hire . . .

VHS

Chances are you'll be using VHS. It's easily the most common video format in the UK, which is pretty weird because the quality of the image is diabolical thanks to the crummy vertical scanning of the half-cocked half-inch tape.



The sound quality is even worse, and all the hard work of creating your audio track will be mashed once you put it on a VHS cassette, where it will be compressed into a pitiful wee strip of tape, clinging on to the edge of the space reserved for the visual image.

Avoid recording in long-play mode at all costs! Visual quality drops and audio takes a suicide leap.

"You can't achieve specialist studio effects. But originality and stimulation are free."



VHS-C

This is the compact-cassette version of VHS, introduced to fit into hand-held camcorders (hernia-inducing plastic boxes stuffed with a portable camera *and* a video recorder).

The quality of picture and sound is exactly the same as with standard VHS – in other words, chronic.

If you use the built-in recorder of a VHS-C camcorder, you'll need a clumsy plastic adaptor before you can play the VHS-C tapes in your domestic machine.

VHS HI-FI

VHS Hi-Fi audio quality is a distinct improvement on the other VHS systems, and vital if you're serious about producing a half-decent stereo sound. But picture quality is still awful.

If you're lobbing out demo tapes, make sure you label your cassette recording as VHS Hi-Fi – your careful audio production will be shredded to garbage if it's played back through a normal VHS.

VHS-HQ

Now this is a bit more like it: the next generation of VHS machines,



available now, with improved sound circuits and watchable visuals.

Freeze-frames are also vastly improved, and most VHS-HQ machines have a tuner for eliminating those irritating electronic ski tracks that infest standard VHS.

Picture detail has been cleaned up and picture noise has been almost eliminated. If you're changing your VHS, and especially if you have a friendly hirer, you'd be crazy not to upgrade to VHS-HQ now.

SUPER VHS

You'll get near-broadcast quality from Super VHS, and it's a truly excellent system. The only trouble is I haven't found a single retail outlet prepared to hire one . . .

BETAMAX

Here's one of those little quirks that make life so interesting – Betamax (usually called Beta) has always run a sluggish second to VHS, though it's a superior system. (It was developed from the successful U-Matic professional system.)

All Beta machines on the UK market operate at the same speed, so at least you won't be tempted to commit any slo-mo crimes . . .

BETA HI-FI

This has exactly the same advantages as VHS Hi-Fi – a must if you're serious about your audiovisual demos.

SUPER BETA

Super Beta is relatively new in Britain, and gives very good picture quality indeed. But the sound's no better than with ordinary Beta, which is a great pity.

Still, Super Beta is worth looking at if you're going to get into short-term hiring.

"With video, wiping out cockups costs nothing"

BETA ED

This is the Beta equivalent of Super VHS, and has the same problem – nobody has received shipments yet.

V2000

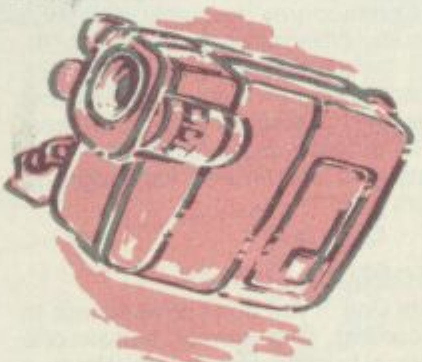
Funny old world, really. There's nothing wrong with this Philips system; it's good as Sony's Betamax, and a damn sight better than JVC's VHS system, but it never made it.

You can pick up V2000s for a few quid these days, and you might invest in a bit of redundant stock if you want to do your editing in-house and need that extra machine.

But make sure you get a good stock of undamaged tapes – supplies are running out fast.

VIDEO-8 (8mm)

This is my favourite domestic system, with high-density metal tape, hi-fi audio (digital audio if you can get access to the decks!), and less stretch and drag on the tape while editing. And it's truly portable, so you can hire a camcorder.



All Video-8 machines have a long-play mode, in which picture quality doesn't suffer too much – but unless you're making your very own musical version of *War And Peace* stick with standard-play, always.

U-MATIC

U-Matic is very rare in domestic setups, and you'd have horrible problems linking this system to other machines. Leave it to the professionals – nobody likes a smartarse.

VCR, SVR, CVC, CED, LASERVISION

These five types of video player are completely obsolete, and the last two cannot be used for recording. They might be giving them away with Cornflakes, but ne les touchez avec un bargepole.

TAPE QUALITY

If you want the best results, you need the best tape. Top-of-the-range Scotch is favoured by many, though Maxell do an excellent Video-8 tape.

Try to use first-class fresh tape stock for your demos; if this is too dear, shove old stock through your local dealer's bulk eraser. It's out the back, hidden under a copy of *Sporting Life*, and it's the one he uses to fake up newish tapes from second-hand stock. (Chances are it will erase the display from your digital watch, too.)

Machine and tape must match: playing a Hi-Fi video tape on a standard machine will do nothing to improve the quality.

The machine's condition affects the tape, too. If your recording heads are over two years old they certainly need cleaning; they could need adjusting; and if they've been hammered they will need replacing.

Using pause mode too heavily may ruin the final print of your tape, and your machine won't thank you for the abuse either.



STAYING IN THE PICTURE

Mel Croucher's been shooting his mouth off on home-grown video – now it's your turn to shoot *your* video productions off to *us* and win that big break.

THE GAMES MACHINE, in conjunction with Mel Croucher's production company Scorpio Interactive Ltd, wants entries for a video promo competition. **The winner** will have his/her demo tape rerecorded and refilmed by expert musicians and film-makers, and produced as a broadcast-standard professional video promo, ready for submission to record and TV producers!

Entries, which must be received by **April 26**, may be on VHS, Beta, Video-8 or U-Matic, and should be between three minutes and six minutes long and be preceded by 30 seconds of blank intro tape. There is no limit on the number of entries each person may make – but quality, not prolificness, will win the day.

Please label your video cassette clearly with its format, title if any, and your name, address and telephone number. Please do not include any images that have been filched from other people's copyright material!

Though THE GAMES MACHINE cannot normally return competition entries, we will return video tapes sent in to this competition if they arrive with a suitably stamped, addressed padded envelope. Otherwise, the usual competition rules printed on this issue's contents page apply.

Send your entries to **VIDEO PROMO COMPETITION, THE GAMES MACHINE, *PO Box 10, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 IDB*** to arrive by **April 26**.

GETTING IN THE PICTURE

You've got your sounds, you've got your video recorder, and now you need some images to complete your masterpiece. This is the fun bit, and your creative instincts can let rip.

Failing that, you can rip off other people's images and adapt them for your own use and abuse. As long as you don't show them in public, hire them out or claim them as your own, copyright problems will not rear their ugly little legal heads.

To produce anything seriously calling itself a video production you will need two video cassette recorders: one to lay down a series of images, and the second to dub them on to a final production with your soundtrack.

There are several ways to get in the picture . . .

COMPUTER-GENERATED IMAGES

Retune your video recorder (*not* your TV or monitor) to the computer's output channel in the vicinity of Channel 36. When your screen is tuned to the video's normal output signal, what you see is what you're recording.

To sync up a computer-generated video to your soundtrack is virtually impossible without expensive equipment such as time-coders. It's far easier to plan your series of images carefully, time each sequence against the soundtrack, and edit the images together in series.

When you're happy with the result, rerecord the whole production – simultaneously sending the visuals into a VCR's video input and the audio track into the audio input. And if it's not quite right, do it again. (That's the advantage of video tape over film: results are instantaneous and wiping out cockups costs nothing except your time.)

It's relatively simple to superimpose two sets of computer-generated images using a Y-type cable-splitter, though some computers are temperamental because of idiosyncratic output.

Commodores invariably give good results, especially the ones with built-in frequency tuners; Sinclair's Spectrums are happy to oblige, but their red backgrounds upset most VHS systems (so avoid the colour); Amstrads are virtually impossible to work with.

VIDEO CAMERAS

Rule One: if you don't have access to a camera, and cannot borrow one from a trusting friend, hire. Hiring a state-of-the-art video camera is ludicrously cheap, and most high-street multiples are happy to oblige. Radio Rentals, D.E.R. and all the rest are in fierce competition, and current hire charges are around £10 per day, £29.95 per weekend and £39.95 per week.

"You can rip off other people's images as long as you don't show them in public, hire them out or claim them as your own"

"Hiring a state-of-the-art video camera is ludicrously cheap"

Rule Two: keep it simple. Avoid gimmicks. Zooming in and out, panning and messy focus changes for no reason at all are very annoying to watch. A series of short, sharp, tightly-edited images is much more effective. Shoot your sequences several times, and edit the best bits together before overdubbing your final soundtrack.

VCR-GENERATED IMAGES

Effects you can produce with the VCR itself include freeze-frames and slow-motion. Many high-street multiples will hire an advanced VCR on a short-term basis, especially if you're hiring a camera at the same time. I recommend the following machines . . .

PANASONIC NV-D80

Brand-new on the market, and packed with digital effects-generators, the Panasonic NV-D80 includes a superb digital frame store which can freeze the picture while the sound continues.

The duration of freeze-frames is adjustable from about one second to about one-sixth of a second, so excellent strobe effects can be made without any additional equipment.

Other graphics effects include picture-enhancement to give your video images a cartoon or oil-painting look; a supersmooth digital slow-motion adjustable from one fifth to 1/25 normal speed; digital noise-reduction to clean up random picture noise; and a very useful autodubbing system.

AKAI VS-35EK

This is the much-heralded 'interactive VCR', with facilities including jitter-free freeze-frame, variable slo-mo from a quarter to 1/20 normal speed, onscreen prompts, automatic frame-indexing and search, and a very aggressive quick-start option.

The biggest problem is that there are 38 buttons to control the beast, so you'll spend your first 24 hours with the Akai VS-35EK trying to tame it.

MITSUBISHI HS-421

This is a very sturdy machine, with digital fine tracking, very steady slo-mo and rock-steady freeze-frame. As well as a few trick frame options, it offers excellent Hi-Fi sound.

SANYO VHR-D500

This one isn't available for hire yet, but it may well be THE machine when it comes on stream in a month or so. Up to nine images can be presented onscreen at any time, and they can be cycled in rapid succession.

Other effects are strobe, zoom (producing images up to 16 times normal size!), mosaic, cartoon-type digitising, and an incredible 'paint' option.

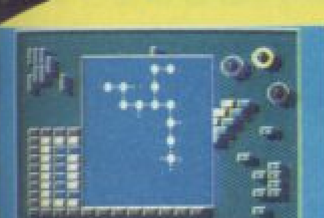
Sanyo's new machine will make a lot of specialist video studios very nervous – special effects previously reserved for the professionals can be used at home at the touch of a button.



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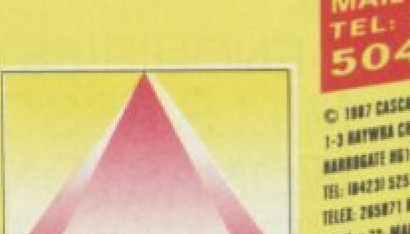
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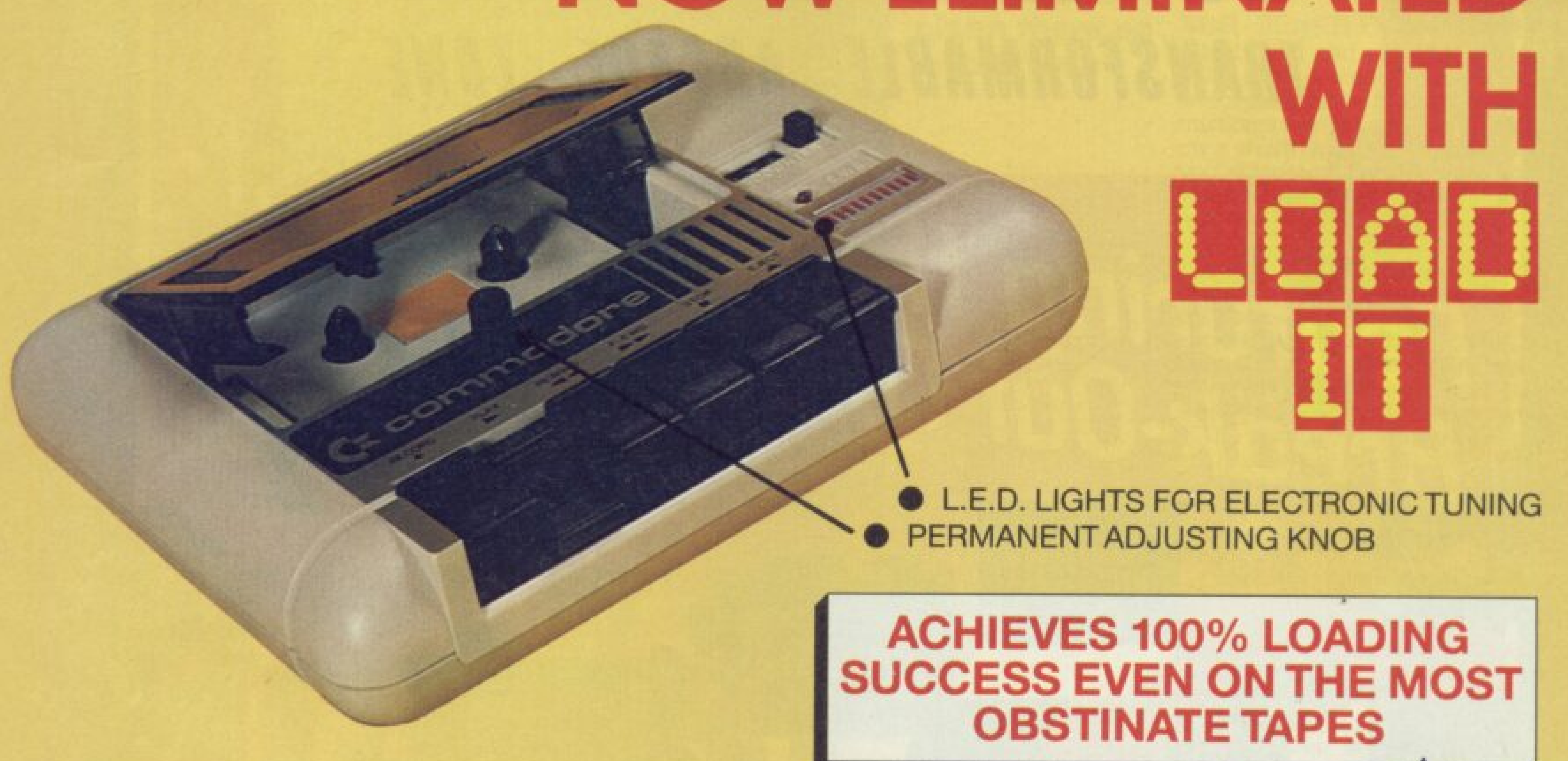
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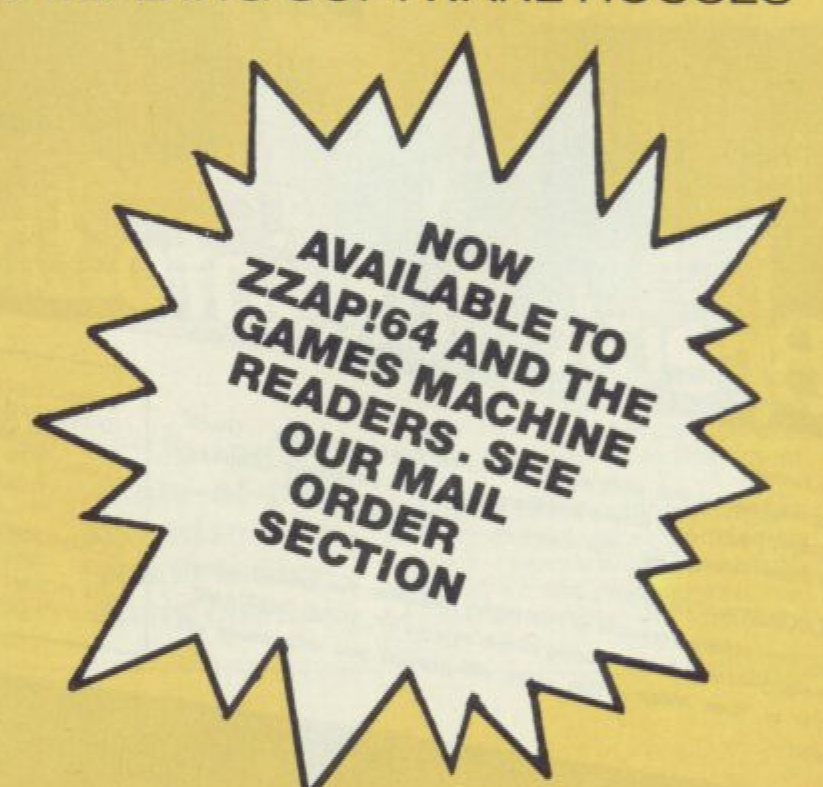
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ARMCHAIR ACTION

Trains, boats and planes – you can board them without leaving the comfort of your joystick. The simplest 8-bit computer gives you the power to fight bloody battles without injury, take a realistic trip to the outer planets of our galaxy and drive the next best thing to a Porsche. The 16-bits – PC, Atari ST, and Amiga – with their racy processing speeds can even simulate the computers of the future and predict events. John Gilbert reports.

What a build-up, and all for a subject which has been regarded as a statistician's dream and a boring aspect of computers for arcade players! Yet, simulation techniques are now constantly dressed up for use in the latest arcade games to make them more realistic. Teenagers want to fly Top Gun aircraft simulators instead of thrashing aliens, and even the stolid war game has a new gleam to its presentation.

Furthermore, those alien graphics and explosions on the screen may seem randomly created by a machine which is almost unbeatable, but with a little knowledge of simulation techniques, and how they're applied within games, you'll be able to outwit a programmer's strategy not only in simulated universes but in standard shoot 'em ups.

POWER PATTERNS

All games rely on patterns created by a series of instructions within the computer. The computer needs some sense of reality in which to play out its games. It has no such sense of its own so it relies on programmers instructions and with the increased graphics capacities of machines like the Amiga those instruction patterns can be read to some extent on the screen.

Arcade champions have an instinct for reading the patterns of aliens waltzing in space, or the movements of laser bolts from oncoming space fleets. Everyone has that instinct to some extent and you can train it by looking at certain aspects of a game. In some cases you won't even need to read the instructions to learn how to score points.

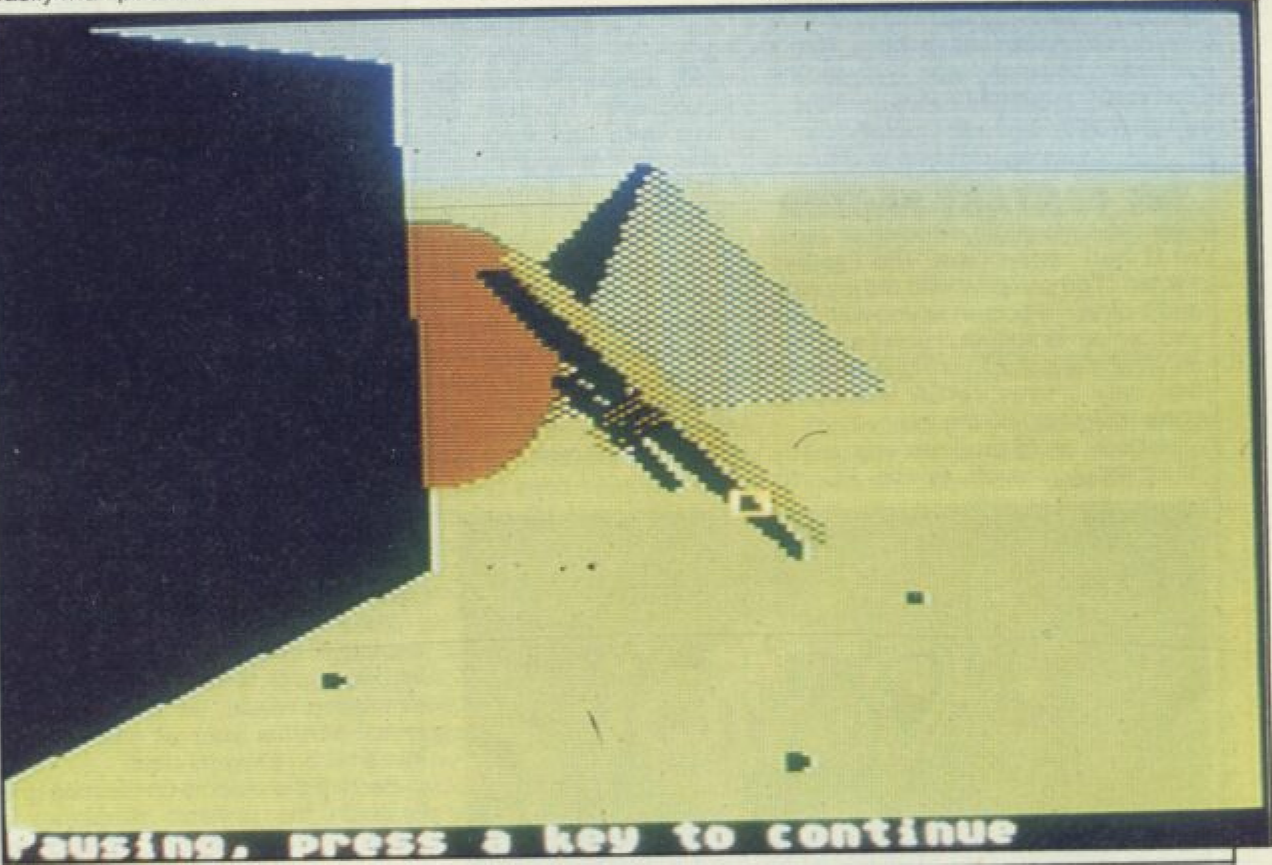
First, though, let's take a look at the problem involved in designing a simulator and find out why simulation techniques are incorporated within most contemporary computer games.

BACK TO BASICS

There are four types of activity that games can simulate: physical, mechanical, natural and intelligent. Your computer deals with them all in the same way, by reducing them to ranges of numbers which can be easily manipulated.

Five years ago, when most computers had limited graphics capabilities, games relied on clever programming to make them attractive

Flying around the landscape can be a touch slow on the Commodore 64, but the sensation is realistic enough



Say, for instance, you're simulating a car in a motor racing game. Your computer needs to know about gear changes so that it can either speed up or slow the car down. You might assign the numbers one to three for the forward moving gears – strange car – and the number minus one for reverse.

The program monitors the position of the joystick where one push forward increases the gear number and one and push back reduces it – and the car's speed. A simple gear counter within the machine keeps track of the joystick movements and adds or subtracts gears.

As a player, and controller of the racing car, you won't know about the numbers being used within the program. You'll think of Reverse gear as, perhaps, an 'R' on the screen's control display and not minus one.

THE FRONT END

The numbers and equations, which control all computer games, are usually stored in a huge database and are used by a small control program, which is often called a shell.

Five years ago, when most computers had limited graphics capabilities, games relied on clever programming to make them

PRESS ANY KEY

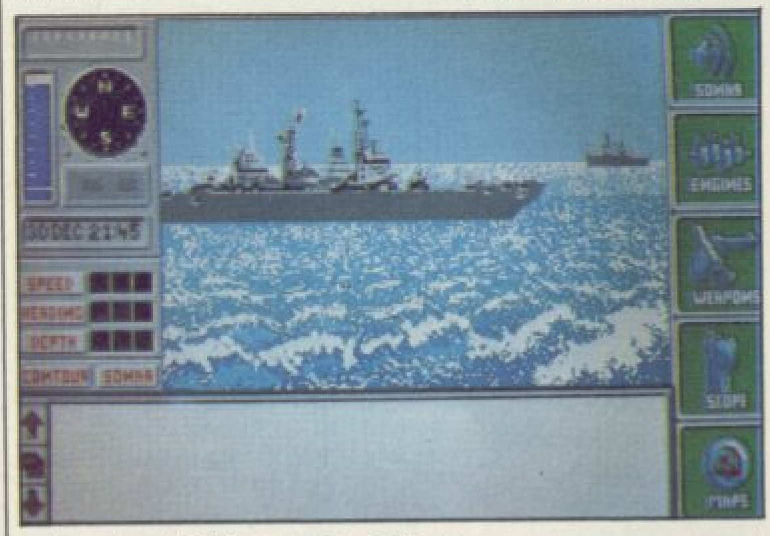
attractive. Features rather than presentation were premium – and the presentation was often very grotty. The technology, and mood, has changed now so even the most complex simulations, such as Grand Slam's *Hunt for Red October* and *Chuck Yeager's Advanced Flight Trainer* from Electronic Arts, need sophisticated, realistic, graphics.

Those graphics provide the front end of any game, the bit that the player sees and, during the early stages of simulation design, often requires the involvement of an expert. Ned Lerner, the American designer of EOA's *Advanced Flight Trainer*, for instance, wanted to create a product which could rival any micro-based flight simulator, so they brought in ace fighter pilot Chuck Yeager.

Yeager quickly convinced Lerner that the old type of flight simulator let you be a navigator but you needed a sense of reality to feel like a pilot. 'The flight simulators on the market were interesting experiences, but I knew I could do better. An actual flight simulator would set you back $50,000. I wanted to come as close to that $50,000 as I could for under 50 bucks.'

It's easy to unravel even the most sophisticated monster's strategy with just a spot of simple observation

No, I said DOWN periscope! ST screen



Lerner's thinking was further confirmed when he asked Yeager to try one of the old-style simulators. The pilot looked with distain at the screen display and the joystick and said: 'I've never fooled with one of these. That's actually because, you know, the damned things are so . . . insignificant.'

THE FANTASY FACTOR

The old-style flight simulators lack, what Ned Lerner calls 'The Fantasy Factor'. You can play with the joystick and look at the screen all you want but you can never suspend belief and feel as if you're flying. Everyone believed that only a large NASA mainframe computer could do the job.

Nobody could program even a 16-bit computer, such as the PC, to accomplish such a task. But Lerner believed that it was possible. All he needed to do was make the simulator more attractive, responsive and thrilling than anything that had been done before.

It took two years to design the *Advanced Flight Trainer*, which offers much more than just take-offs, flights around the New York skyline and landing. Yeager wasn't primarily interested in the colourful scenery which marks flight simulators because real pilots 'Never have much time for scenery'.

Lerner followed the expert's advice and, instead of making fluffy clouds and blue lakes important, built a high speed racing simulation against six computer controlled opponents on 15 obstacle-littered courses.

Yeager also convinced him to to put in a test pilot section for mach-speed aircraft such as the rarely seen X1 and Instigator. Both aircraft were earmarked as top secret until last year.

CONCRETE TO CONCEPT

Once you move from the design stage to programming you have to swap the concrete, real, world where aircraft wings are made of metal for the conceptual world of the computer.

A simulation like *Advanced Flight Trainer* uses all four types of simulation I mentioned earlier – physical, mechanical, natural and intelligent – and each type requires different basic simulation technique.

Let's start with the world in which you want to fly your fighter jet or in which you want to move. A database, which can be visualised as a grid for simplicity, provides the ground plan, or master map, on which the simulation's moveable objects and landmarks are positioned. It provides your computer with the position of your aircraft, other computer-controlled aircraft, natural landmarks, and other obstacles.

The database also tells the computer about the contours of the land in relation to the landing strip. The simulation would, for instance, have to tell whether your jet has crashed into a hill on a low fly-past!

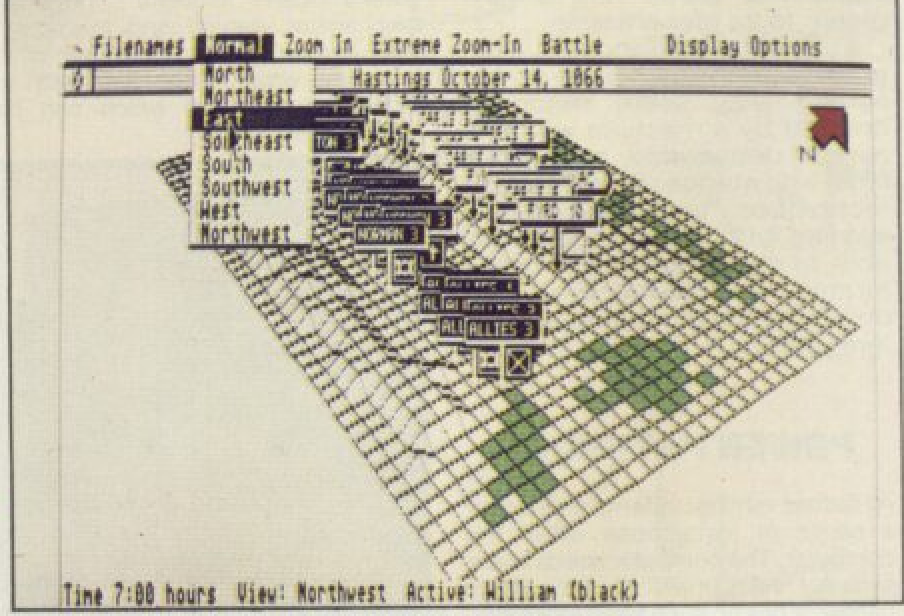
Each of the objects on the map grid is given the physical properties – mass, volume, velocity, resistance, height and width for those of you are mathematically inclined – so that other objects can manipulate or interact with them in a realistic way.

Sounds complicated but the best, or worst, is yet to come for the programmers when they introduce the physical, mechanical and intelligent parts of the simulation. Flight simulators in with combat options, such as *Advanced Flight Trainer*, combine the physical, mechanical and intelligent techniques to create computer-controlled opponents.

The program performs a loop of instructions which handles the combat. It first monitors your aircraft's position in relation to each of its fighters. The computer then changes the position of its aircraft, again following instructions which are within the simulator program. There's no magic involved, just the foresight of a design team who thought that you might make a particular move in their game. The result, however, is artificial intelligence.

Once the computer has decided upon, but not made its move, the simulator brings in the mechanical techniques which plot each drone's new position, then checks height, air speed and fuel. When it's satisfied that the drones will not crash, or aren't in immediate danger of losing fuel, the simulator makes the changes in position and updates any instruments – such as the radar screen – on your display panel. You're then allowed to change your jet's position and the simulation loops around its list of instructions to try and beat you again.

The simulator takes only micro-seconds to perform all these tasks as a series of moves. What you see, however, is the continuous movement of your aircraft and those of animated objects on the landscape.



1066 and all that: Hastings on the morning of October 14 as William and Harold face each other for the battle that changed English history – ST screen

FACT INTO FANTASY

Chuck Yeager was keen to put as many features into EOA's *Advanced Flight Trainer* as he could, but there were some ideas which designer Ned Lerner refused to consider. Yeager reflected the views of many British software houses when he said: 'If you really want to scorch something, hell, you can program the X-31 in there, the aerospace plane. Now, see, you got some kid who can say, man, this thing



is smoking along at Mach 25. Then you get a Log generating system, and once you accelerate out to about Mach 18 you're gathering liquid oxygen and then you've got liquid oxygen and hydrogen turned into chemical rockets and you go into space with it.'

The air ace wanted to take an ordinary experimental jet and turn it into a space-bound vehicle. You can indulge your fantasies with a computer and still stick closely to reality.

Think of the possibilities. Rainbird certainly has with its *Universal Military Simulator*. It's the ultimate in war simulations, and allows you to fight selected battles such Waterloo, Marston Moor or Hastings.

The programmers have also lifted the time boundaries of these battles, and *UMS* allows you to pitch an army from one time period, say the Roundheads, with an army from another, perhaps a battalion of American Infantrymen. The *UMS* sticks by its rules of reality and it's likely that the resulting computer battle would show which army would win in reality.

Moving further away from reality, but still sticking within the boundaries of a simulation, you can use *UMS* to create wars between mythical beings, such as orcs and elves. Just input the physical characteristics and you've got the nearest thing to a battle between mythical races that you're ever likely to see.

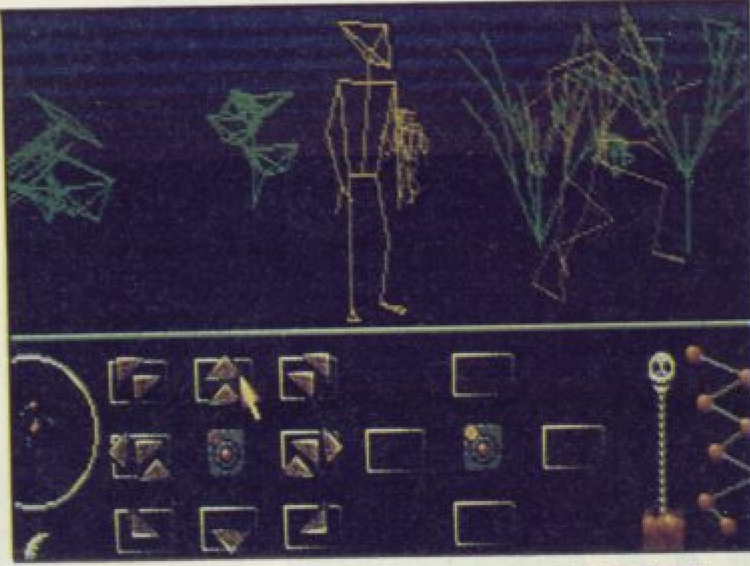
Ocean has gone all the way and created a totally fantastic world in *Eco*, but has still built in elements of simulation. The game simulates a self-supporting natural environment in which you're placed as a randomly selected creature. You've got to evolve from a humble, helpless, insect into a predator by manipulating the creature's genetic code.

Experimentation shows that, just as the most radical changes take place in the form of a creature, if you alter the end nodes of its DNA in real life so the same effect occurs in *Eco*. If you survive past the small spider phase, change the top two genetic nodes first, then the bottom two, and finally those at the centre outward, no matter what beast the simulation initially gives you, you'll be able to survive long enough to create a predator and not fall into the trap of becoming part of the ecosphere's flora.

Beyond and Firebird also had sophisticated simulation ideas on their minds when they took on Mike Singleton and his team to produce *Star Trek*. Beyond paid in advance of £50,000 for the rights and expected a pretty special game from the programmers.

Unfortunately, the Atari ST version is all graphics and contains almost no plot. Despite the amount of memory needed to store information about the Star Trek universe, it's a less complex simulation than Ocean's *Eco*.

The ship and battle simulations, stripped of their glossy screen packaging, would in no way test the powers of the humble Spectrum. Indeed, similar game features have been seen in the BBC version of Acornsoft's *Elite* – with smooth, effective 3D graphics to boot. *Elite* marked the first of the arcade/simulation games and, despite pretentions by Rainbird's *Starglider*, still holds rank as the best.



TOWARD ARCADE REALISM

Eco's world is a fantasy creation, but the simulation of the environment – and the graphics display – where everything has a cause and effect makes the game more realistic. The same is becoming true of the new arcade games. Landscapes are more realistic, alien adversaries move in complex patterns and often evolve from one deadly stage into another.

Games such as *Bubble Bobble*, *Platoon* and *Predator*, use artificial intelligence. Monsters no longer doggedly track you down, but rather form strategies which change and become more cunning as you alter your playing tactics.

Platoon in particular shows that simulation techniques can be slipped into an arcade game without annoying addicts. Not only does the game put your five raw recruits up against the wily Viet Cong, but also includes an impressive simulation of emotion. The objective is to get as many recruits back to base camp as possible, and to survive they've also got to cover each other and act as a team if your score rating and morale is to stay high.

You can indulge your fantasies with a computer and still stick closely to reality.

WINNING

Finally, here's some general advice on how you can use the patterns created by the still relatively simplistic and artificial intelligence routines used by arcade game programmers. I think it's easy to unravel even the most sophisticated monster's strategy with just a spot of simple observation.

Developing skill at playing arcade games takes time and can be frustrating. In the past many games relied on simple methods to drive the *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* ghosts around the screen.

The program compared the co-ordinates of the *Pac-Man* to those of its ghosts and used subtraction and addition to find the quickest route to Pac's position. As a result the ghosts looked almost bumbling and slavishly followed Pac around the maze. In some versions of the game simple faults in the programming mean that the ghosts were often blocked from a direct route to Pac's co-ordinates by maze walls.

The elementary programming of such games as *Pac-Man* made them easy to play if you knew the secret. In Pac's case, all he had to do was move around, and stay on the outside of the maze to draw the ghosts toward him then quickly change direction towards a fruit or duck out the side of the maze to gain more time.

Enter artificial intelligence and the hosts of simulation techniques. Those ghosts and other creatures can now develop their own attack strategies in less than a second, they seem less predictable and the games seem harder to play. That's just not true, though, the same simple movement patterns are still there they just change quicker in an effort to make the adversaries seem intelligent.

No doubt, when you're playing a game, such as Imagine's *Rastan*, you're impressed with the graphics, the way the monsters move, the way the scenery passes or firey chasms flicker. What you should be doing is looking for patterns within the game. Creatures may seem to change strategy every time you fight them, but there are patterns within their movements and they aren't so complex to read when you concentrate.

You subconsciously pick up these patterns when you start to play a game well, so just think how much quicker you'd pick up skill by looking at the location on the screen of a creatures stance – limbs and body positioning – rather than his weapon. Experiment with the game for an hour or so, looking at how your adversary reacts to your movements, and you'll soon work out how you've got to react to win and not just stay in the game.

For instance, most martial arts games have a simple combat structure. In *Way Of The Exploding Fist* you should, for instance, capitalise on the way in which your opponent always takes two steps backward when a move back is required. Take a look at the relationship between your character and the computer's when such an event happens. Your opponent will perform in exactly the same way when you repeat your actions, at least until the next phase of the game.

Don't be confused if you're confronted by group of a similar alien type. Each type of alien has it's own characteristics and will fight using these. If you watch just one of the aliens you can see how the others' performances are mutated from your alien subject depending on its screen position and how you react to it. The game will always play the same, so once you've made your observations go back in there and do some damage.

NOT SO CLEVER

The increasing complexity of arcade, strategy and simulation games make them seem invincible but, despite the use of simulation techniques, such games can still be cracked by simple observation.

Despite all the clucking about artificial intelligence, all games will rigidly follow program instructions until computers with real intelligence are found. Until that day the patterns may get more complex, the games may get more realistic, but your computer will only be able to simulate an opponent and its moves can only simulate the intelligence of its programmer.

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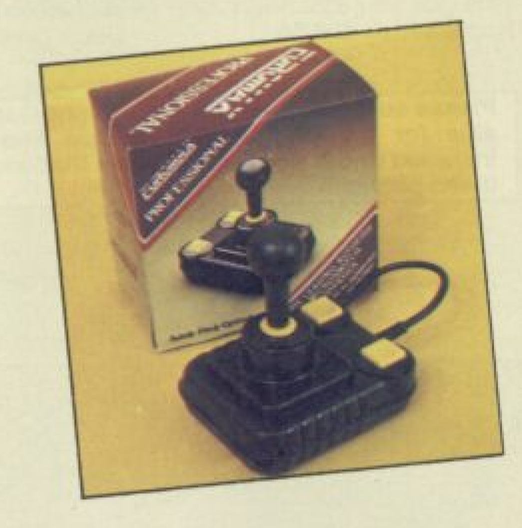


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COIN-OP CONFRONTATION

The ATEI (Amusement Trades Exhibition International) held at the Olympia in London during January brought together over 160 businesses dealing in amusement machines. Robin Hogg visited the show to see what was on display.

BLASTEROIDS

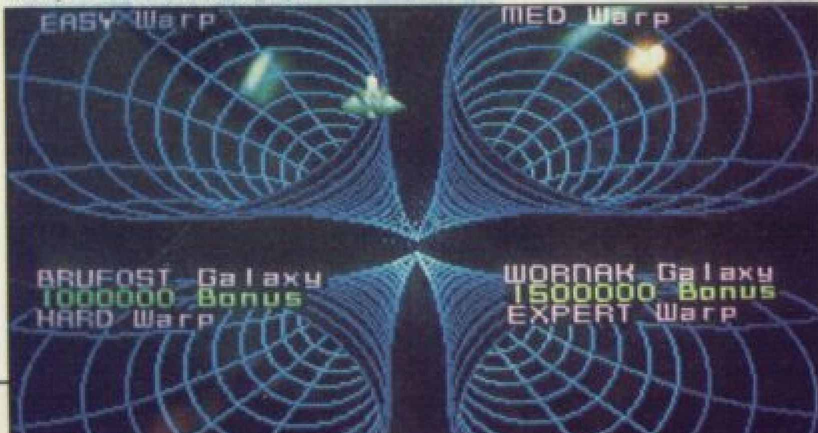
Producer: Atari

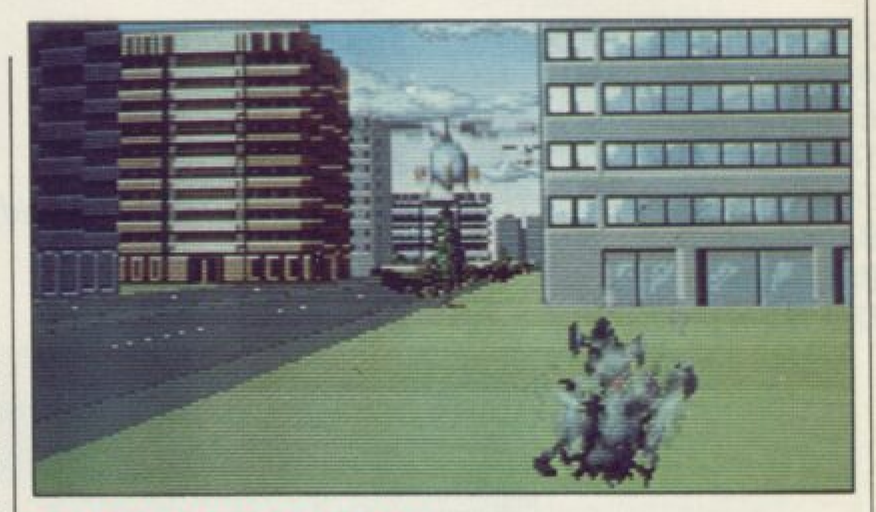
ATARI's big release of the show was *Blasteroids*, a totally revamped version of the 1979 hit *Asteroids*. It's got a host of new features including a dual player facility, gradual energy loss instead of losing a life outright, detailed space backdrops, three types of ship to transform into (each with their own type of firepower, engines and armour) and some very tricky alien creatures to destroy. Red asteroids are destroyed to reveal extra weapons and defences to add to the ships, allowing each player to develop their own game strategy. A neat extra is the ability for both ships to join together to provide some really awesome firepower.

The real stars of the game are the asteroids themselves, superbly digitised, spinning masses of rock of exceptional graphic quality – a massive jump from the vector graphics of the original. Destroy all the asteroids and a warp gate appears which takes the player(s) to the selection screen where another of the sixteen levels is chosen. The final level brings in a big green mother alien complete with an army of aliens hovering around – not too difficult an opponent if you've collected the necessary weapons and ship extras along the way, but a challenging final encounter nevertheless.

Atari have realised that golden oldie coin-ops can still pull in the crowds (and rack up the profits), and even though the concept is nearly a decade old, *Blasteroids* is immense fun and another surefire winner.







THUNDERBLADE

Producer: SEGA

THE FLAGSHIP of SEGA'S stand – *Thunderblade* – continues where *Afterburner* left off. This time though it's a helicopter you control.

Although similar in gameplay to *Afterburner*, *Thunderblade* has some notable differences. The throttle has been altered to include hover, forward and reverse controls and there are vertically scrolling sections where the chopper flies through rocky chasms, over ships at sea and along city streets. Although it's a standard vertical bomb and shoot 'em up, some very effective layered graphics are used, which give a great feeling of height, especially when the helicopter gets hit and crashes down to the ground.

The main part of the game is viewed in *Afterburner*-style 3D and gives a great sensation of weaving round and between buildings, pillars and trees. Where the game falls down is in the control method. It may be realistic, but the joystick control is sluggish and doesn't work as quickly as it should for this type of high speed shoot 'em up. Trying to use the speed throttle as well is awkward to say the least. As a game idea it's great, but SEGA enthusiasts will find it little improvement over *Afterburner*.

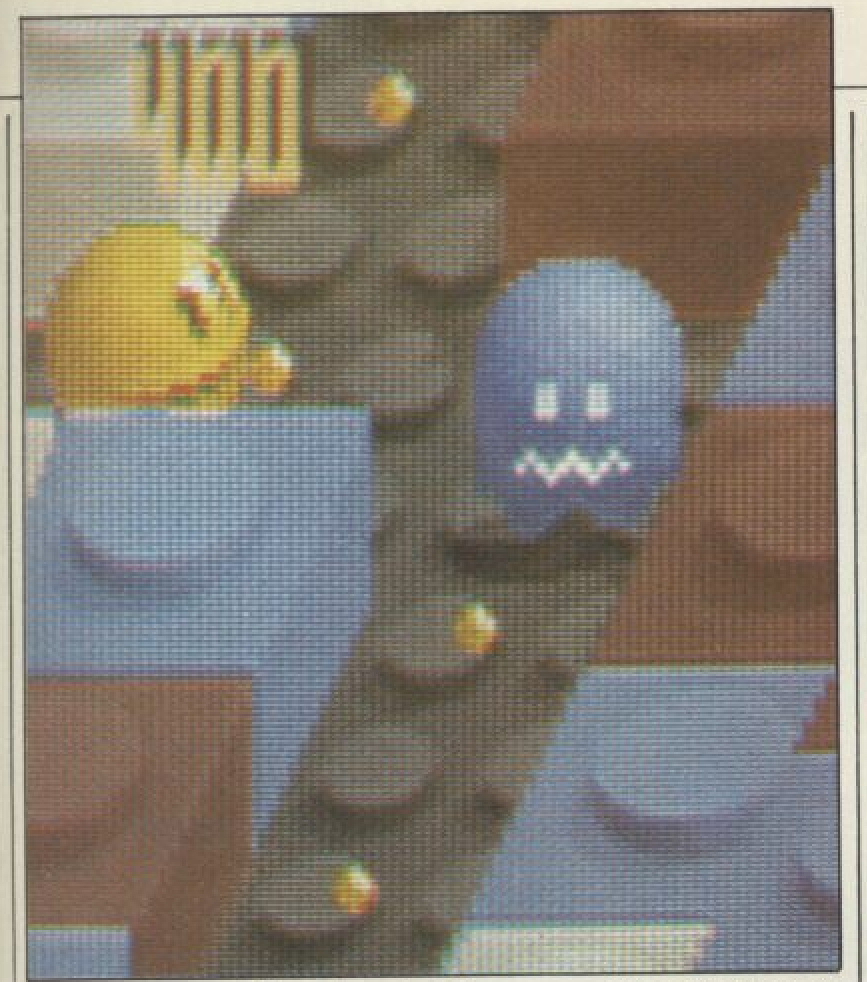


PAC-MANIA

Producer: Atari

PAC-MAN needs no introduction, having become THE most successful coin-op game idea in history. This time though, the basic concept has undergone some drastic alterations.

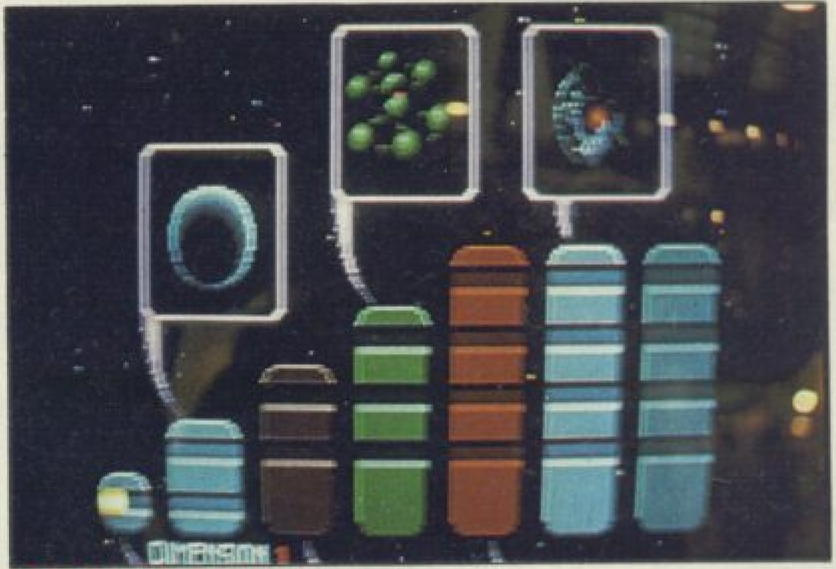
He's now in three dimensions, has the ability to bounce over ghosts and can now gobble his way through four increasingly complex but tastefully decorated 3D mazes. There are also some new cartoon scenes to provide a much needed break in between levels. The ability to bounce over the ghosts adds a new twist to the action as *Pac-Man* can change direction in mid-bounce, giving the ghosts the slip. And if that isn't enough, the ever-voracious yellow



blob can eat special items to get extra speed or double points.

Just to keep Pac-Man on his toes, two extra ghosts in the shape of Sue and Funky have been recruited to help Clyde and the mob. With six ghosts to avoid and four different mazes to try, *Pac-Mania* offers plenty of challenge.

The success of *Pac-Man* lies in its simplicity, immense addictiveness, the non-violent concept and the overwhelming cuteness of the yellow ball himself. *Pac-Mania* looks set to continue its success and will probably start off a new *Pac-Man* craze. You have been warned!



GALAGA 88

Producer: Namco (under licence from Atari)

ONE of the greatest shoot 'em ups of its time, *Galaga* has now been brought bang up to date with improved graphics, sound effects and superior gameplay. The dual spaceship feature, bonus point screens and dive-bombing alien hordes of the original are all there – but some new twists have been added to the action.

In between screens is a vertically scrolling stage where asteroids, exploding balloon-like creatures and swarms of baby aliens are destroyed before the attack wave starts. The bonus screens have some great tunes for blasting away to (listen out for the souped-up Tango) and the alien movement patterns are even more complex than before. Progressive play is now possible as the game now has different stages (made up of different dimensions), but with no continue play feature you'll have to be a pretty good arcade blaster to do well.

To summarise, *Galaga 88* is a great game. Even though it's simple and offers nothing new, it's packed to the gills with playability, addictiveness and is worth every ten pence you pump into it. Fans of the original will feel right at home with *Galaga 88*.

GOING OVERBOARD

There were plenty of new board games released at the Earl's Court Toy Fair in London earlier this month – but due to our magazine schedule, we can't review any of the goodies we picked up until next month. Still, one game that did arrive in time for this month's column was *Chainstore* from Ideas By Seares.

GAMES NEWS

To get the dice rolling, Paul Lamond Games, designers of the best-selling *How to Be A Complete Bastard – The Board Game*, have 11 new products lined up for the coming year, the first of which is *How To Be A Complete Bitch – The Board Game*, based on the Pamela Stephenson book. Two other licences come in the form of *Catch Phrase* from the Television South quiz show and Rolf Harris' *Cartoon Pics* – a sort of of Charades on paper. There's also *Pop of the Form* which derives from the eponymous Radio One show, and boasts 2,300 pop trivia questions.

A somewhat controversial board game also to emerge from Paul Lamond is *Spy Catcher*, inspired from the publicity surrounding the Peter Wright novel. The objective is to get your book published by seeking permission from the government, the courts, the newspapers and the publishers.

The man you just can't get away from, Terry Wogan, has his own *Soap Opera Quiz* – a trivia game for fans of those highly-popular television serials. However, if you fancy something a bit more suggestive, try *Sexual Trivia* and *Dirty Pictures* – soon to be launched.

Two of the more surprising games scheduled to be released in the following months are *ITN News at Ten* from Paul Lamond Games, and *The News from the BBC* released under the auspices of The Great Games Company. Both offer trivia questions about national and international news of the past.

The prettiest board game to be released this year looks likely to be *Zodiac Spells* from Zodiac games. We hope to have a review copy for next issue. From Kenner Parker comes *Outburst*, which certainly looks like it could be a highly entertaining party game.

Look out for reviews of all those games over the forthcoming months – and we'll be keeping you posted on any new developments in the board game market.



CHAINSTORE

£17.95, 2-6 players

Chainstore is a variation on the classic *Monopoly* game, but the ideology behind it is much more up to date.

Each player begins with £60,000 and proceeds around the board buying such shops as Woolworth PLC and Next whenever they can. When three shops of the same name are bought by one player, it becomes a chain store and money can be invested in stock.

With each throw of the dice a player picks up a Standing Order Card, very much like the Chance Cards in *Monopoly*, which help and hinder progress. For example, the player may have to pay additional rent on shops, or may even win a shop window display and collect £1000! More often than not, a Standing Order card reveals, 'You are a customer – pay as instructed' in which case should you land on a shop with stock that's owned by another player, you have to pay for shopping!

A novel twist of *Chainstore* is the constant availability of bank loans – if you run out of money, you can borrow up to half the value of your stores and chains – but this involves paying 5% interest every time the player passes start!

THE VERDICT

The loan system extends the playing time considerably – and because you can continue borrowing it's almost impossible to see an end to the game at any point. It also makes the banker's job more involved working out interest payments, loans and repayments in full.

Unlike *Monopoly*, little is left to tactics and skill – the roll of the dice and the Standing Order Cards leave too much to chance. Still, it's an enjoyable game and should definitely be enjoyed by those who like money-oriented board games.




SHE'S MAD. SHE'S BAD
MERCY DASH
WRITTEN BY MEL CROUCHER
DRAWN BY ROBIN EVANS
JUST ANOTHER DAY IN THE LIFE OF SOME NEWSFIELD FREELANCERS...
SELL OATS, FIRE GUARDS, HOLD TIGHTS, BUY, BOY BLACKBIRDS, NICK WIRE....
I'M PERCHED ON A SCAFFOLD RIG HALFWAY THROUGH A DELICATE BIT OF DETAIL....BUT I'LL GET IT, I'LL GET IT...
WHO? JAMES McSHEAN? NEVERERDERYER!
THAT'S GAMES MACHINE, YOU IDIOT! WE DO WORK FOR THEM! GIMMEDAT!
HI THERE! EH? WHA'? HUH??? NIK, YOU'RE JOKING! THE ARTWORK FOR MERCY DASH NUMBER THREE HAS GONE MISSING??
GUB
IT CAN'T BE TRUE!
HI, BOYS! WHAT'S NEW?
NO DERCY MASH FOR GM+, THAT'S WHAT, MY CHICKEN! (GULP GULP) THE ARTWORK GOT LOST!
IS THAT ALL?
LOOK, IT'S ONLY WEDNESDAY! YOU'VE GOT UNTIL FRIDAY. DO ANOTHER ONE. I WON'T CHARGE YOU MUCH EXTRA TO RENT MY PERSONALITY.
HOW CAN WE EXPLOIT YOUR EXPLOITS? YOU'VE DONE NOTHING BUT LOAF ABOUT ALL MONTH!
OH, DON'T SQUINNY! TOSS ME A CASH ADVANCE, AND I'LL WRITE MY OWN SCRIPT!
ALL RIGHT, AS WE'RE PUSHED-WELL, I AM, BY HIM- BUT REMEMBER, NO LIBEL, NO SEX, NO VIOLENCE, NO RACISM NO DRINKING, NO SMOKING...
NOT GOING TO BE VERY LONG, IS IT!?
AND ABOVE ALL... NO COP-OUT ENDING!!
SURE, SURE.... LET'S SLEEP ON IT....
SKIP THE OVALTINE TONIGHT, DAD! BRING ME SEVEN-UP AND DEXTROSE WITH A TOT OF VODKA! OH- AND A POUND OF LYMESWOLD!
PHALLIC CYMBAL
HELLO I'M THE PIMAN AND I OFTEN WONDER IF I'M STILL MEL'S COPYRIGHT
SHE'S MAD, SHE'S BAD
GET DOWN ROVER
OH MY GOD IT'S MIRANDA RICHARDSON
HELLO, MY NAME IS MEL CROUCHER. EVANS IS PUTTING HIS OWN CODSWALLOP IN AGAIN, I SEE
STRAPPED FOR CASH? CALL MERCY DASH!!
HELLO, MY NAME IS DEATH, AND I OBJECT TO ALL THIS GRATUITOUS NON-VIOLENCE
OHHH... I'VE DREAMED OF BEING DRAWN BY WAKELIN SOME DAY!
DO YOU LIKE BÖCKLIN?
I DUNNO, I'VE NEVER BÖCKLED
HELLO, I'M AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES CARTOON
HELLO, I'M AN ALARM CLOCK! GM+ IS GOING TO PRESS GO SHIFT YOUR ASS!
HELLO MY NAME IS SIGMUND FREUD AND I'M WEARING A SLIP
HELLO, I'M ROGER BENNETT AND IF ROBIN EVANS THINKS HE'S GOING TO GET A JERSEY FREEBIE FOR THIS GARBAGE, HE CAN GO SUCK EGGS!
KA POP
HAHA!! THEY FINALLY DROPPED IT! THE NUTTERS! HAH!
CRACK
HELLO, I'M ROBIN EVANS, ART DIRECTOR OF THIS DREAM SEQUENCE. SO SUCKS TO YOU!
NEEAAUUURGGHH! COLD SWEAT SIDDY!!
WHO'S SIGMUND FREUD?
WHO'S THIS GUY WAKELIN?
GET ON DOWN ROVER
WHO'S ROGER BENNETT?
DUNNO. ANYWAY, WE STILL DON'T HAVE A MERCY STORY.
STILL TEN MINUTES BEFORE THE LAST POST. WE'LL THINK OF SOMETHING
PUT THE COP OUT, DAD.
101 RECIPES FOR LAMB

VENI, VIDI, MIDI

After last month's overview of MIDI and the tapelessness of it all, Jon Bates ventures into musical territories that any micro blessed with an interface and a dollop of software can conquer.

By a strange quirk of fate (or a devious plot by the post office) all the programs scrutinised here are Atari ST based. Owners of Amigas, Macs, IBMs, Apples, BBC, and Archimedes can put down those poisoned pens right now as soft and hardware for these will be covered in future issues, and since the principles of these programs are very similar across the board, there's no reason to go off in a huff, is there?

There's little doubt that sequencing has changed the way many records are written and recorded. In fact, you could make a pretty respectable claim that it's the very reason for the development of some styles of music – house music, electro-sequenced stuff et al. The original analog sequencer conveniently arrived at the same point in time that a group of 'serious' composers were working with repeated short patterns, including Phillip Glass, Terry Riley and Steve Reich, who begat 'Tubular Bells' which begat Jean-Michel Jarre; not to mention the family tree of rap and street music.

Sequencers can take a lot of sweat out of the game of getting things right, by avoiding lots of tiresome overdubbing. MIDI sequencers of the real-time variety store their musical input in data form and give you the power, via a microcomputer, to cut it up, select what you want, re-map, alter volume, swop tracks, and change sounds. It can, of course, drop your results on to a disk for fast retrieval when Steven Spielberg drops round for an earful of your latest compositions with his next film epic in mind.

Final versions can be recorded straight onto tape as lovingly described in detail in the previous issue of THE GAMES MACHINE. For an astute review of the cassette recorder to use you should also consult last month's issue when Mel Croucher ran through a few of the multi-track machines on the market.

One large fly in the ointment is that many of the sequencers available for 16-bit machines are not only aimed at the bedroom, but at the professional studio as well, and so professional price tags of £200 and upwards are not unusual. They also have the capacity to control seemingly limitless quantities of synthesizers: a luxury which is of course sadly lacking for most of us. But think big and positive – you can always synchronise your tracks to tape.

One of the major functions of a computerised MIDI system is that of editing the sounds that a synthesiser creates.

CASSETTE EMULATION

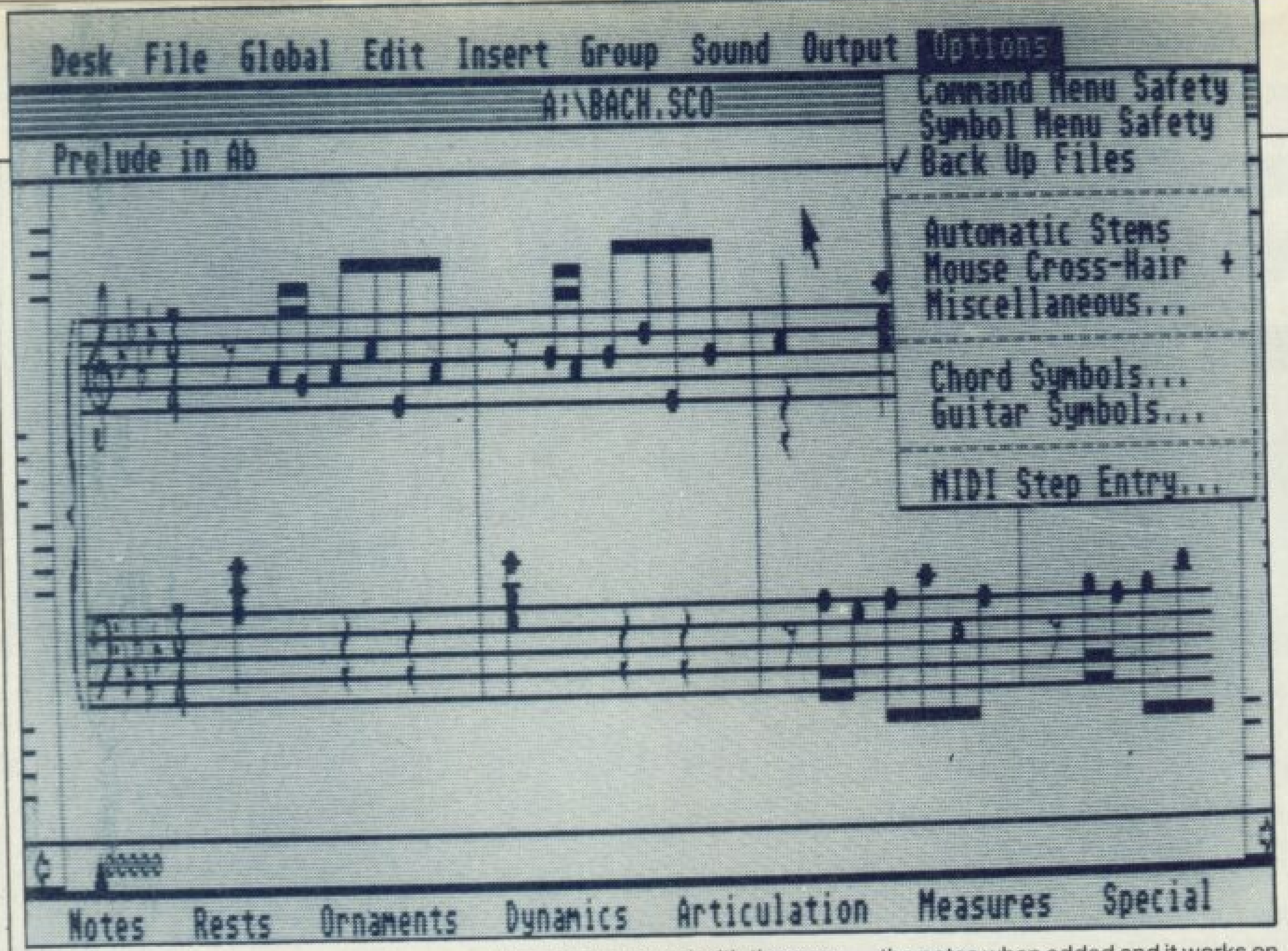
Probably the best known sequencer, and one which crops up in the studios of the famous on both sides of the Atlantic, is the *Steinberg Pro 24*, first seen about August 1986 and which weighs in at £285. **Steinberg Research** are based in Germany and honed up their programming skills on numerous musical packages for the Commodore 64 (if any 64 owners see these kicking around, you stand a chance of getting them at the right price nowadays).

The *Pro 24* comes in several versions, which is not always obvious until you boot it up, when it tells you at the top of the main screen. The most significant difference is that versions 1.0, 1.1, 1.2 and so on only have graphic score editing whereas versions 2.0 and above have the addition of actual music notation editing in some detail. There's no print option as yet, but it's in the pipeline. Anyway, check out which version you have as by rights you should now be paying full price only for version 2.0 and above. All versions are dongle protected.

Like much of the sequencing software, its main controls emulate a cassette recorder with record, play, fast forward and back, plus the addition of extra fast wind and an instantaneous 'Go Zero' function which automatically starts you off from the beginning. In fact, it functions

Desk File Randomize Graphs Hardcopy Goodies
BANK(A) KETCH.LIB
TX 81Z
VOICE MASTER
SOUNDBITS SOFTWARE
© 1987
TRANSFER
INIT VOICE
RENAME
EDITOR
BANK(B) ROM_A.LIB
1.Pedalbass 2.Clavvy 3.Bigfuzz 4.Electritar 5.Zingo 6.Tenor 7.Sloosh 8.Hi Ride 9.Elegrand 10.Bass Drumm 11.SEQ-BANJO 12.Snare #3 13.Uchama 14.Gongy 15.Parpist 16.Big Bite 17.Soft ting 18.Rasper 19.Carillion 20.Electric-B 21.Harp 2 22.Tapper 23.Saxophone 24.INIT VOICE 25.Zife 26.Lead Organ 27.Triangle 28.Clinquer 29.Honky Tonk 30.Sustained 31.Dome 32.Dustbin
1.GrandPiano 2.Uprt piano 3.Deep Grd 4.HonkeyTonk 5.Elec Grand 6.Fuzz Piano 7.SkoolPiano 8.Thump Pno 9.LoTine81Z 10.HiTine81Z 11.ElectroPno 12.NewElectro 13.DynomiteEP 14.DynoWurlie 15.Wood Piano 16.Reed Piano 17.PercOrgan 18.16 8 4 2 F 19.PumpOrgan 20.(6 Tease) 21.Farcheeza 22.Small Pipe 23.Big Church 24.AnalogOrgn 25.Thin Clav 26.EZ Clav 27.Fuzz Clavi 28.LiteHarpsi 29.RichHarpsi 30.Celeste 31.BriteCelst 32.Squeezebox





. . . many of the sequencers available for 16-bit machines are not only aimed at the bedroom, but at the professional studio as well, and so professional price tags of £200 and upwards are not unusual.

very much like a 24-track recorder, playing back from any point on all the tracks that have been turned on. As a means of global control, the *Pro 24* has a 'Mastertrack' which governs the overall tempo, including shifts and changes bar by bar. It has identifiable areas on the screen on which to 'click', allowing peripherals to be altered; more detailed work is accessed via the drop-down menus.

BUM NOTES

Each of the 24 tracks can be organised as a succession of patterns, with each pattern lasting as long as you want. Patterns can be copied from track to track, placed in any position, repeated or deleted.

The 520ST can cope with just under 90,000 MIDI 'events' and the 1040ST just over double that, so it's unlikely that you will run out of time on your major works. A track can contain up to 999 bars which, at an average pace, is about 30 minutes worth of music (on the 520ST), and you can store up to 5000 patterns, each named individually.

Recording is very simple: select the track you want to record on, 'click' the record box and away you go. It will faithfully reproduce all your notes, mistakes included, on playback. Across the bottom of the screen is a rather neat volume indicator for each track in the form of a bar graph, which is responsive to note velocity and provides a very useful guide for seeing which track is doing what.

To correct any bum notes there are two methods: 'Fast Access' is a temporary quick-fix method, or you can go for notation or grid edit, depending on which version you have. In this full edit mode not only can you correct notes and hear them audibly, but you can also shift them in time by infinitesimal amounts to get the right 'feel', shorten notes, lengthen them and so on, individually or globally. As this is a permanent edit and you have 24 tracks to play with it's better to copy to an empty track and then fiddle around with the copy.

One rather unique feature is that you can fill up bars with repeated notes to your liking, which is very handy when programming drum machines. The screen display of the notes is very slick indeed. For additional recording, sections can be made to loop or the recording process commanded to drop in and out at specified cue points.

The program can save to disk any individual patterns or indeed the whole song; the former means that you can cross-fertilise your favourite licks from one composition to another. It goes without saying that a program such as this will remember all the sound changes you need for the synths, whether by the program number alone, or by the actual data for the synth.

To sum up, the *Pro 24* is a professional package, and as such it has depths that will take time to plumb, but as with all the better software of this sort, it's very easy to get started. If you're thinking seriously about music creation, check your piggy bank and then check out this program.

SCORING MADE EASY

If the actual scoring and printing out of music is important to you, try the *EZ-Score Plus* from **Hybrid Arts**. It's a very clear and comprehensive package that lets you input scores by several methods and display them with the sort of resolution and detail that you'd expect from printed music bought anywhere. In fact, coupled to a laser printer you could probably set up as a bespoke music printer without much trouble at all!

It's a very wide ranging program that converts song files from most of the **Hybrid Arts** sequencers into real notation. If you choose to enter notes manually you can do this by either dragging notes with the mouse, entering them from the QWERTY keys, or by using a MIDI keyboard. It'll work out automatically how to group the notes when added and it works on up to three lines (staves) at a time. This makes it an ideal tool for setting songs, especially as it has the capabilities to insert lyrics within the score as well as putting the chord names above and even the guitar tabulature (the grid that shows you where to put your fingers!) which can be customised to your needs.

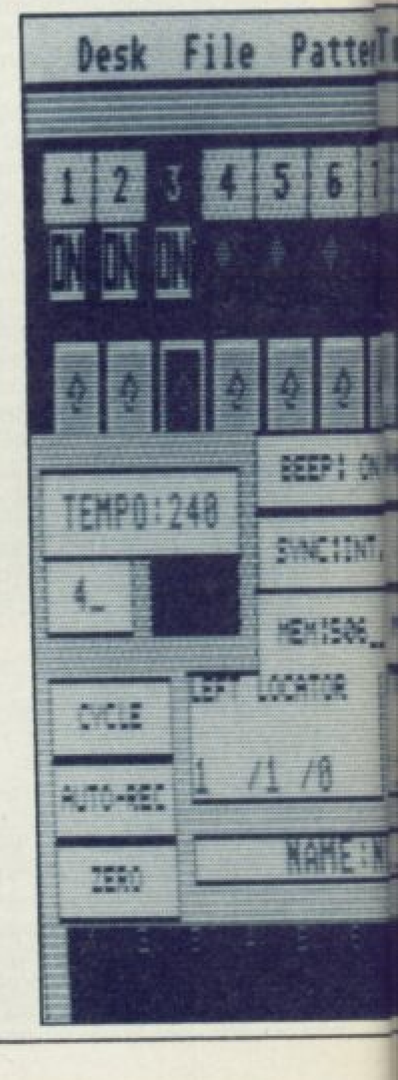
Staves can be formatted in four ways, which should cope with most needs at this level. It has over 100 symbols in its library including notes, rests, accidentals, clefs (although not alto or tenor clefs), rehearsal marks, proportional bar lines, dynamics, ornaments, bowing marks and so on. It's also compatible with the *Degas Elite* graphics program for real desk top publishing aficionados, and with **Hybrid Arts**' own professional scoring software designed for orchestral and more complex scores.

For the price of £84.95 it's quite a bargain, but I would add that it's only to be approached if you are quite serious about printing and setting music. I could see it proving invaluable in educational establishments for printing student compositions that have been realised on sequencers and synths, for performance or evaluation.

Digital synthesizers are notorious for the headaches they cause when editing sounds, because there are a few multi-function buttons on the control panel, many peripherals of sound to control but you are limited to an numeric LCD display of around 17 or so characters. Thus, a lot of juggling has to go on in your head to retain some control over the sound you are making.

The problem is even worse with synthesiser modules – those boxes that haven't got a keyboard but contain the guts of the synthesiser. One of the most popular of late is **Yamaha's TX81Z** which creates and stores banks of FM voices. Unlike other FM synths, this one has alterable basic waveforms – yet another fact to retain mentally – plus the ability to combine voices to create a 'Performance Memory'. Add to this all the peripheral

The 520ST can cope with just under 90,000 MIDI 'events' and the 1040ST just over double that, so it's unlikely that you'll run out of time on your major works.



things like pitch bend and modulation sensitivity, velocity sensing etc, etc. All these functions are controlled from an 11 button panel on the front of the **TX81Z**.

FM EDITING

Soundbits Software have a comprehensive voice editor called, rather unimaginatively, *TX81ZED*. For the princely sum of £69.95, it lets you loose in some of the darker corners of the module. The main function is of course on the Edit Screen via which you gain access to the voice parameters: aim at the required parameter with the mouse and click on the left or right button to increment or decrement the value. As an added bonus, a graph of the main sound shape can be made to overlay on the screen whenever you are working on the envelope generator peripherals. These can be copied from operator to operator. A minor niggle here is that you cannot view all four operators at once, but you can play the sound at any time to hear the effect of your editing. It also has a randomise feature which throws up unexpected sound combinations and offers new sounds for your aural palette to digest and your fingers to tweak.

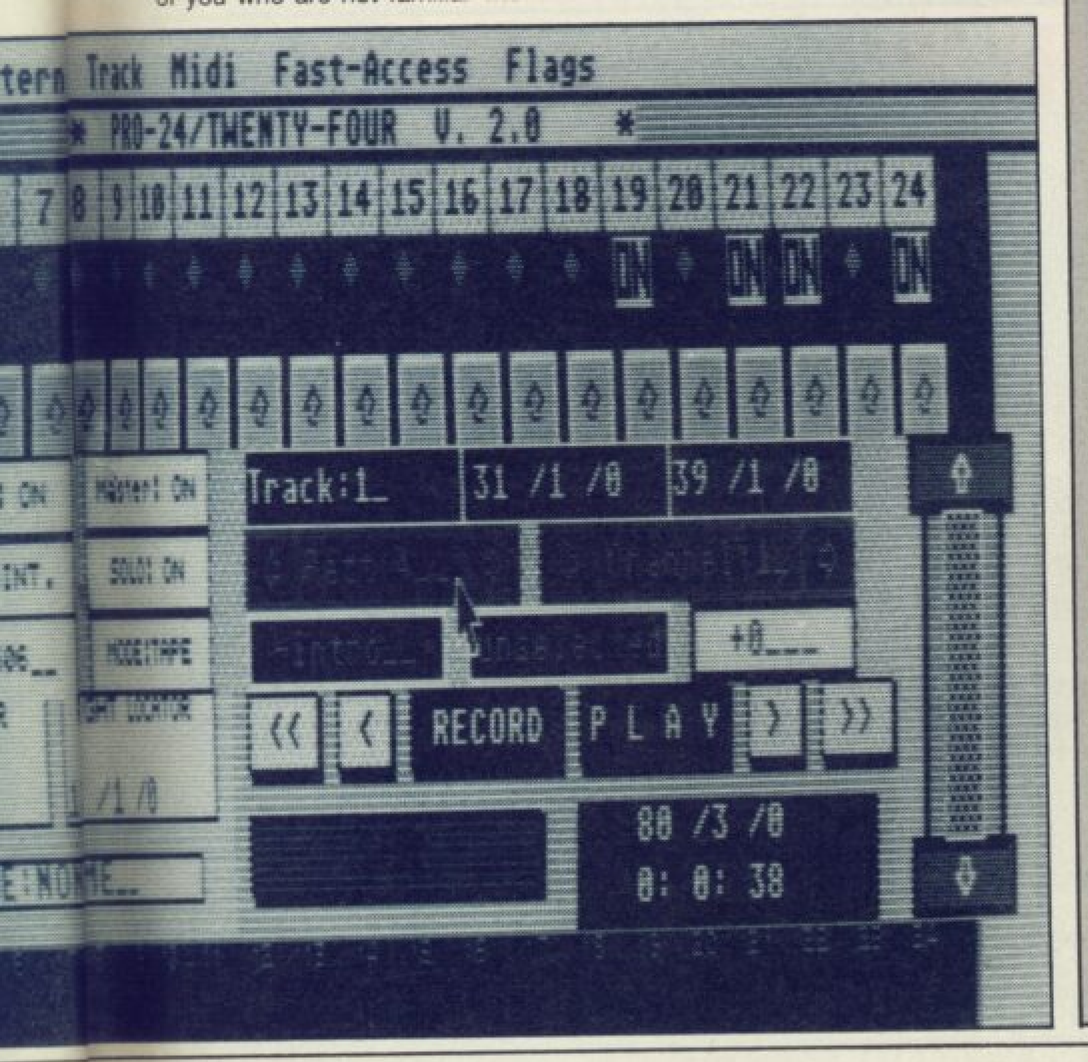
Performance Editing is taken care of on a separate screen and all screens can be printed for permanent reference to voice banks and all peripherals. An advantage of such an editor is that you also have fast, effective storage and retrieval of the sounds – of which you may have several hundred on file – and individual voices can be shuffled around from bank to bank. Apologies now to those of you who are not familiar with FM editing and have just read the previous paragraph – it will have appeared as clear as mud to you.

In truth, most sound editing software works along similar lines and will offer you most or all of these facilities. **Soundbits** offer editing software for most popular synths and the prices are quite competitive. Like most editors, *TX81ZED* comes with a few banks of custom sounds that you may find useful and if you consider that buying a soundbank on its own for any synth can cost you twenty pounds or more, the price is not at all bad.

So there we are. Three of the main uses of MIDI interfaces all at professional level for the Atari ST. Although this column compares and contrasts various different utilities for different equipment and micros, it is hoped that it can serve to inform you of just what is possible with the processing power at your command.

Next month Jon provides a compendium of utilities and terms – your own guide to what's possible and what some of the music terms mean, plus reviews of a sequencer, and a sound editor for that most popular of synths, the DX7.

A special thank you this month to Sonyx Music **for loaning Jon lots of bits and pieces and for all the inside info. Further information on the review software can be obtained from:** Sonyx Music, *61 High Street, Wordsley, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 5SD. Tel: 034 480951* **or** Syndromic Music, *24-26 Avenue Mews, London, N10 3NP. Tel: 01 444 9126.* **If you have any ideas or queries send them to** Jon Bates, THE GAMES MACHINE, *PO Box 10, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1DB.* **Jon cannot guarantee a personal reply, but the most useful tips and queries will be answered in these pages.**





From Issue Two of THE GAMES MACHINE

Shades Competition

Bill Wernham of Invergarry, Invernesshire DH35 4HN and **Angus MacLeod**, London, SE3 0PE are lucky fellows – they've each won themselves a modem, a micronet subscription and 25 hours free play on Shades!

Alternative Games Competition

Jason Burrell of Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 6PS should soon have delivery of a bulging goodie bag containing a football, gloves, roller boots, tennis racket and balls, badminton net with rackets and seven shuttlecocks, flat green bowls, a table tennis and swing ball set, a pair of trainers, hoola hoop and skateboard. Brilliant eh? There are also 25 runners-up prizes of *Alternative World Games* . . .

Jack Diamond, Ayrshire, Scotland KA8 9LB; Robert Hall, Leiston, Suffolk IP76 4JY; Iain Barber, Leyland, Lancs PR5 2YR; Gordon Ross, Oxford OX9 6RY; Wayne Fretwell, Market Deeping, Lincs PE6 8LR; Graham Roberts, South Wirral, Cheshire L64 0TQ; J A Riddell, Kent CT6 8SJ; Hon-Ching Cheung, Kent CT11 7DS; David Coverley, Redcar, Cleveland TS11 6DG; Paul Gerrard, Liphook, Hants GU30 7HR; Mr R Ramdhany, London SW16 5AQ; Mr P Postlethwaite, Birmingham B31 4AH; Kevin McNamara, Oldham, Lancs OL8 4BY; Simon Ashe, Andover, Hampshire SP11 6DG; David Jumani, Irvine, Ayrshire KA11 1JF; Robin Cavill, Dewsbury, W.Yorks WF12 7BE; William Callaghan, Tipton, West Midlands DY4 8AS; Richard Ormson, Bury, Lancs BL8 2HW; David Neasham, Seaham, Co.Durham SR7 9HA; Martyn Owen, Oadby, Leicester IE2 4HA; Keith Tutt, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN23 6EH; Mr H Mortensen, Seaham, Co.Durham; Andrew Stevens, Middlesbrough, Cleveland TS5 7RS; Mark Watkins, Amersham, Bucks HP7 9BB; Hitul Thobhani, Leicester LE3 0FD.

Piranha's *Yogi* Competition

Ten winners to receive a pair of *Yogi Bear* boxer shorts, a *Yogi* T-shirt and a copy of the *Yogi Bear* game . . .

Jonathan Sharpe, Marlow, Bucks SL7 2JE; Christopher McBride, Liverpool L9 3AR; Paul J Long, Witham, Surrey CM8 1ER; Douglas Bursnall, Gwynedd, Wales LL42 1DE; John Sholicar, Cheltenham, Glos GL52 3DA; Mark Robinson, Nr.Wolverhampton, Staffs WV9 5BD; Mrs W Howard, Hoddesdon, Herts EN11 9EE; Peter Bridgeland, Emerson Park, Essex RM11 2RH; Sean Abell, Nottingham NG5 8ES; David Skipsey, Brough, North Humberside HU15 2NG;

And there are also 30 runners-up prizes of copies of *Yogi Bear* . . .

Mark Evers, 6537 PC Nijmegen, HOLLAND; Tracy Smith, Leeds, Yorks LS25 1BY; Simon Muschamp, Beverley, N.Humbs HU17 5LX; Jorgen Jacobsen, DK-2600 Glostrup, DENMARK; Richard Stone, Birmingham B31 1PS; Jeffrey Fuge, St.Georgeu Bristol BS5 8SN; John Abbott, Nottingham NG9 3BU; P H Parker, Leeds LS15 8EY; Russell Howell, Bracknell, Berks RG12 6QP; R W Johnson, Glentham, Lincoln LN2 3EQ; Mr Michael Jones, Birmingham B32 1NA; John Kelly, Co.Mayo, Ireland; Steven Wraxall, Manchester M23 8HQ; Andrew Stevens, Middlesbrough, Cleveland TS5 7RS; Benjamin Wiltshire, Caistor, Lincs LN7 6SG; Richard Brown, Telford, Shropshire TF1 4XX; Keith Tutt, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN23 6EH; Colin Hudson, Leigh, Lancs WN7 3LS; Alex L Purkiss, Lingfield, Surrey RH7 6AH; Hans W Schneider, West Germany; Mr P S Alldridge, Whitchurch, Shropshire SY13 1HS; Joel Jones, Rhonnda, Mid Glamorgan CF42 6PG; Charlotte Williams, London SW12 8LS; David Menzies, Manchester M20 8JU; T Harston, Saltburn-By-Sea, Cleveland TS12 2ND; A Boyd, Onchan Isle Of Man; M Westall, Dorset BH12 3HA; Kevin Shelley, Manchester M21 1EN; Howard Thorpe, Southampton SO1 8AX; Gareth Courage, Birmingham B31 2QT.

Phasor Competition

20 winners to receive a Britannia Phasor One joystick . . .

Gary Marr, Sheffield S5 8RP; Stewart Hopkirk, Pinner, Middx HA5 5PD; Donald Crease, Auchterarder, Perthshire PH3 1BW; S Brownlee, The Borders, Scotland TD1 2EL; K P Hallows, Liverpool L4 9UH; W D White Jnr, Aldershot, Hants GU12 4SU; Nolan Rowles, Ormskirk, Lancs L39 4QZ; Christopher Fraser, London W14 A0V; Selva Anandasivam, Herts EN6 1EH; Mr S Stevens, West Sussex BN4 6LD; Mark Brown, Northampton NN6 9AQ; Lucas Whittaker, Llandyssul, Dyfed SA44 6LW; J D Buchan, Surrey KT20 7UD; Aundreas Hodgins, Co.Tipperary, Ireland; Rory Meehan, Co.Donegal, Eire; David McNamara, Dublin 16, Eire; Richard Burton, Helston, Cornwall TR2 6RB; Jon Stothard, Bolsover, Derbyshire S44 6BH; Mr S J Lee, Huntingdon, Cambs PE17 1JP; Mr J Hearn, Aylesbury, Bucks HP21 9XD.

Red October Competition

Tony Wallis, Sheffield, Yorkshire S6 5DX is soon to be taking an all-expenses trip to London to see HMS Belfast. There are also 10 runners-up prizes of *The Hunt For Red October* . . .

J M Aymes, Hinckley, Leicestershire LE10 1AN; Mark Mallin, Bishop Auckland, Co.Durham DL14 0LR; Martin Hartley, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 1RQ; Steve Dawson, Blackburn, Lancs BB6 7NH; Andrew Surtees, Hartlepool, Cleveland TS27 4EZ; Jaron Collis, Co.Down, Northern Ireland; Eric Henry, Co.Meath, Ireland; Mr S C Dawkins, Rutland, Leics LE15 9RR; Matthew Netherwood, Newsome, Huddersfield HD4 6RA; Ian Hudson, Nr.Burton-On-Trent, Staffs DE13 7AY.

UNCLE MEL'S TRIVIA QUIZ

That lovable punster Mel Croucher is back once again to tease and titillate your trivia buds with another wild and whacky selection of questions. Those who can answer more than 18 out of 20 questions correctly can read upside down . . .

1) When did liquid crystal displays first hit the market place? **(a)**1948, **(b)**1969, **(c)**1978.

2) How many times per second does the quartz crystal in my wristwatch vibrate? **(a)**1, **(b)**32, **(c)**it's broken.

3) How many feminists does it take to program a computer?

4) What has Novagen got in common with the Maquis de Sade?

5) What have the following got in common with computer games: APEGRAM, SHUN PIG, PRAT DOERS

6) When and where was the LED (light emitting diode) invented? **(a)**1950, Japan, **(b)**1960, Great Britain, **(c)**1970, Jimmy Page, Robert Plant, John Bonham, John Paul Jones, 'Whole Lotta Love'

7) Why didn't electronic calculators catch on in Britain until 1971?

8) What did the Czech writer Karel Capek introduce to the world in 1920?

9) What was the name of the play in which his innovations appeared?

10) Is Activision's Claire Hirsch the same height as **(a)**Adolf Hitler, **(b)**Napoleon Bonaparte or **(c)**General Tomb Thumb?

11) The US uses NTSC, France and the USSR use SECAM, the UK and most civilised Europeans use Pal. What are they?

12) What is the capital of Silicon Valley?





13) One of these photographs depicts Code Master's grey eminence, the other depicts a massive immobile mountain. Which is which?

14) Who wrote the novel on which the Argus game *Hunt For Red October* is based?

15) What are GST, FTL, LCL, PSS, ABC, CCS, CDS and E2S?

16) Spot the odd one out: Bernard Matthews, New Hampshire USA, a duck's egg, US Gold.

17) Who programmed *Ant Attack, Jet Set Willy, Tau Ceti*?

18) What is the difference between a DIN-plug and an F-connector?

19) What were the dying words of the murderous computer HAL, in '2001'?

20) In hardware terms, what is a 'twisted pair'?

ANSWERS:

1) (c)1978 (an LCD display was used in a wristwatch which retailed for over £200)
2) (b)32,768 vibrations per second.
3) FOUR. One to type in the data, three to organise the creche.
4) *Backlash*
5) *Rampage, Gunship, Terrapods*
6) (b)1960, Great Britain
7) The United Kingdom didn't go decimal until February 1971, and no commercial calculators could cope with shillings, florins, farthings, ferkins, roods, pecks, scruples and all the other wonderful measurements then in use.
8) The Robot
9) Rossum's Universal Robots
10) (b) Napoleon Bonaparte, they both measure 5 feet 3 inches and conquer all who lie before them.
11) Colour television systems. (NTSC: Naff Tacky Sick Colour; SECAM: Stabbing Eye Colour And Migraine; Pal: a brand of dog food)
12) SV
13) Mount Everest is the one with the wind up it, Bruce Everiss is, er . . .
14) Tom Clancey
15) They are all software houses
16) A duck's egg (it doesn't produce turkeys)
17) Sandy White, Matthew Smith, Pete Cooke
18) A Din-plug has several little pricks, an F-connector has a single screw.
19) 'Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do. I'm half crazy, all for the love of you . . . '
20) Two plaited wires, used with micros to reduce the effects of electrical interference.

NEXT MONTH

ALL ELITE SYSTEMS ARE GO!



Almost since the dawn of the home computer games industry, Elite Systems has been synonymous with top ten games chart entries. Success after software success continually flows from this West Midlands company, whose stream of hits to date include *Thundercats, Buggy Boy* and *Ghosts and Goblins*. Elite are soon to undergo a major in-company re-organisation, incorporating, amongst other things, a large recruitment campaign for 16-bit programmers.

In next month's packed issue of THE GAMES MACHINE, we get the inside story on the continuing success of Elite Systems LTD and their plans for the future. Don't miss it.

- Apologies necessary. Last month we promised a feature on Bulletin 1000. Unfortunately they're having major alterations carried out on their premises, and couldn't physically fit us in. However, in Issue Six (which is nearly next month), there's an even bigger and better feature planned. One of the alterations Bulletin are going through is the addition of an editing studio, so by the time we get there, all the processes used to create videos will be achievable in-house.
- Mel Croucher thrills and delights with yet another Trivia Quiz, he also teams up with Robin Evans again to bring you Mercy Dash the cartoon. And, as if that isn't enough, he takes time out to investigate and report on the Public Relations merchants, hype and the Charts.
- Music Maestro Jon Bates explains some of the musical terms in use currently and indulges himself in a sound editor for the DX7 synthesiser.
- PLUS the latest multi-format games reviews, previews, board games, fantasy games and adventures.
- Don't miss out, the next issue of THE GAMES MACHINE goes on sale from March 17 at all good newsagents.

ADVERTISERS' INDEX